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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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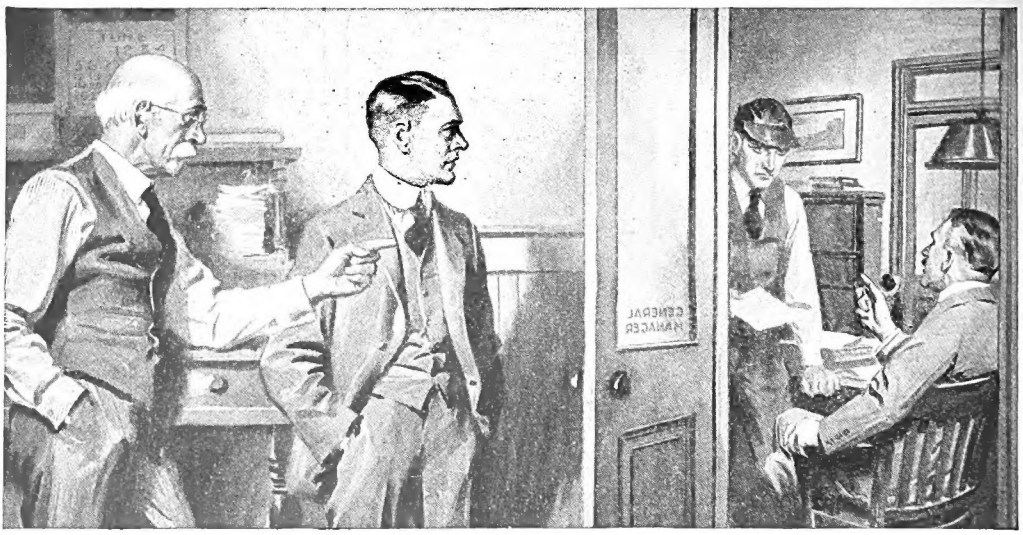

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The First February *Adventure* will be in your hands in two weeks, January 3d. The numerous features start off with:

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First February Adventure

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Adventure

January 18, 1918

VOL. 16 NO. 5

With Sharp Sword-Edges

A Five-Part Story
Part One

by

Farnham Bishop
and
Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Authors of "In the Grip of the Minotaur," "Malena," etc.

CHAPTER I

MURDER

PLOWING at a labored gallop through a wilderness of powdery snow, the horses of King Halfdan bore their master's wagon ever nearer to Ringariki and safety. Halfdan and his four men-at-arms, full-armored against possible attack and wrapped in thick furs against the biting, choking cold, huddled close together in the straw on the wagon-bottom. Now and again the king turned his eyes on the driver, as if to bid him urge the horses to greater speed; yet he uttered no word.

But the warriors were not so reticent. Lulled by the fumes of drink into a false sense of security, they bickered softly among themselves, and sang snatches of rough songs, raising their voices whenever they felt Halfdan's vigilance over them relax. One, drunker than the rest, burst suddenly into roaring, thick-voiced song:

> The gods first made good mead for thirst,
> And guzzling, found their work was good——

The king's hand fell heavily on the singer's shoulder.

"Silence, fool!" Halfdan whispered savagely. "Do you want the berserks down on us? The next time one of you makes a sound, he gets my knife in his neck!"

Knowing their master to be as good as his word, the men relapsed into a quiet as profound as the stillness of the gray dawn. The horses raced on, stumbling and snorting as their feet found snow-filled hollows in the rough road.

Halfdan raised himself to look out over the driver's seat. Straight ahead, the way sloped down toward the icy surface of a lake, whose frozen crust formed a continuation of the road and saved the Winter traveler a long detour around by the main highway.

"Rykinsvik Water," muttered Halfdan. "Straight across, Arni, and be swift!"

The driver laid his whip over the horses' flanks; and the beasts dashed forward down the slope and on the snow-covered ice. Their momentum carried them perhaps ten yards over it, when, without so much as a warning crack, the frozen surface gave

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way beneath them all at once; and horses, wagon, and men were swallowed up by the chill, splashing water. Weighed down as they were by their mail and wrappings Halfdan and his warriors sank struggling to the bottom.

A moment later all was still again; the water lay calm and unstirred. The only sign of that which had happened was the carved wooden driver's seat, surrounded by clinging bits of wet straw floating in the middle of a wide, ragged black hole in the white mantle of the lake. That, and something which gleamed brightly a few paces beyond the hole.

FROM the farther side, in the slowly brightening morning, came a great company marching toward that ragged hole in the ice. At their head road two men on horseback: one lean and iron-gray above his glimmering mail; the other broad-shouldered, ruddy-faced, with fierce blue eyes and crisp golden hair. Behind the host, above the jingle of armor, rumbled and creaked the noise of laden wagons.

Suddenly, catching sight of the black hole ahead, the young man reined in his horse, with a ringing cry of "Halt!" The host came to a surging stop behind him.

His eyes staring, his face rigidly white, the young man pointed toward that break in the white innocence of the lake. The older caught his glance, nodded, and dismounting, held his companion's horse.

"Go and look, Harald," he said quietly. "I will bide here."

Harald, his beardless face pallid, sprang from the saddle and raced swiftly toward the break. All at once he stopped, raised his hands to his face, and cried aloud—

"Guthorm! Come quickly!"

The older man left the horses standing and hurried up at once. Without a word, Harald pointed to the floating, carven driver's seat frozen into the new skim-ice, then to the track of hoofs and wheels that led down from the road and died at the edge of the black hole.

Grief and pity in his eyes, Guthorm turned away.

"Some traveler has come to an ill end," he said.

Harald groaned, and the tears came into his eyes. When he spoke again, his voice was stern.

"It was my father," he said. "Do not seek to hide it from me, uncle. You can read the signs as well as I. There is the track of his wagon; here is the seat; I know it by the carving, and by the runes in which his name is cut upon the back. My father is dead!"

Guthorm laid his arm about the young man's shoulder.

"Mayhap he was not in the wagon when it went down," he urged, "or perhaps he got out, and escaped."

"Not so," Harald answered sadly. "If he had, we should have met him. This is why he did not meet us at the place appointed! Here, take my birnie off!" And he wrenched at the fastenings of his chain-mail shirt.

Guthorm caught his wrist in alarm.

"What would you do?" he cried.

"Break through that ice and get my father's body!"

The older man flung both sinewy arms about him, and held him in a vise-like grip.

"That you shall not," he protested. "The water is deep and cold. You would die with burning lungs before we could get you back to warmth and shelter. Halfdan lies fathoms deep under the ice; you could not possibly find him."

Reason reasserting itself, Harald ceased to struggle, and nodded curtly. Guthorm released him, and he turned away, his eyes struggling against tears. Suddenly his face hardened, as he caught the gleam of something that shone in the gray light a few paces from the hole. He sprang over to it, and picked up from the snow a half-buried steel battle-ax, the fine edge of which was notched, and its inlaid cheeks covered with crystals of chopped ice.

A moment Harald looked at it, then he faced about and examined the hole once more. Guthorm came up to him; and Harald held out the ax, pointing to the runes inlaid in the steel.

"Thord Gandalfsson's ax!" he cried fiercely. "Look there, where the edges of the ice show its marks! This was no accident, but murder!"

"Right," growled Guthorm. "It was Thord who did the deed, as this ax shows; but his cowardly father, Gandalf of Vingulmark, had a hand in it. I know Gandalf's ways. It was cunningly contrived; the blocks were cut out and removed while the

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clouds were heavy with yesterday's snow-storm, so that the water might freeze over just enough to bear a covering of snow to hide the trap.

"The murderer knew that Halfdan's wagon would break through without displacing the snow on the edge of the ice, the center being so thin, and so thought to make it appear an accident. But there, where the wagon careened, all the new ice was broken away, showing where the old was cut through, as you saw. This shall be well avenged!"

Harald walked back to his men, Guthorm following. Both turned their horses, and mounted in silence; then Harald cried out to his warriors:

"The king is dead! His grave is here, beneath the ice, where he lies by the act of Thord Gandalfsson. If ye ever loved him, or received gifts from his hands, help me to avenge him now! We turn back at once, marching south to meet the murderer. Before another sun he or I will sleep the long sleep!"

The warriors raised a loud cry of grief and rage, brandishing their weapons and clashing their shields. Then, facing about, the host turned toward Vingulmark, with hearts lusting for revenge.

CHAPTER II

THE SPOILING OF THE FEAST

SIGURD STAG, turning in his great oaken seat, laid his hand on the shoulder of the sinewy lad beside him.

"Bid them bring in the ale, Gunnarr," he ordered; and the boy, bowing with affectionate deference, left the hall.

In a moment the door opened, and Gunnarr marshaled in four sturdy peasants, who lurched and staggered under the weight of an immense cask.

"Steady! Together all!" barked the oldest of the four; and with infinite care they lowered their burden tenderly to the floor, as near the blazing fire as they had been able to approach.

Taking a heavy hammer from his girdle, the butler, or beer-thane, knocked in the head of the cask with a few well-placed blows. As the last stroke, not so careful as the others, descended on the wood, a stream of brown ale shot out on the hot stones of the fire-pit, where it hissed and bubbled. A long, tense sigh of anticipation rose from the score of hard-drinking men-at-arms on the benches along either wall.

Sigurd Stag threw back his great head and laughed till his red beard wagged.

"You grow too eager for the drink, Buri," he gibed. "I think you would bring down that hammer of yours on your own head if you thought there was ale to be got from that old barrel you call your carcass. Fill the horn quickly now, and then fetch Gunnhild, if she is ready."

His merriment was echoed noisily by every huge-shouldered retainer. The gusty roars of laughter rose to the rafters, making the tattered war-banners pendant from the blackened beams sway gently to and fro. House-carles and bench-thanes thumped each other's backs, protesting loudly that there was never a joke in all the world so good as their lord's. Sigurd, in rare humor at their applause, passed his gold-banded drinking-horn to the abashed Buri, who filled it from the foaming cask, and returned it to the king. Then, muttering sullenly to himself, the old beer-thane departed on his errand.

Looking about for fresh game, Sigurd let his eyes range along the benches.

"By Odin!" he cried, the merry wrinkles in his cheeks deepening again, "there's not a Swede-stabber of you all who has not his eyes fixed on the drink as if he had tasted nothing but salt fish for a week! Here, Hawk, you look the thirstiest! Take the horn quickly, and put out the roaring fire in your throat."

Hawk needed no encouragement. He leaped from his seat, reached out an eager hand, and swung the horn to his lips with so practised a flourish that the stinging ale was down before the sweep of his arm was more than ended.

The king brought his huge hand down on his thigh with a ringing slap.

"By the beer-kegs of Valhalla!" he exclaimed. "This man has not his equal in all Norway. Kinglet though I am, few as are my following, I can boast that my court possesses the deepest drinker, the mightiest hunter, the swiftest wolf-hound, the prettiest maid, and the best man of his hands from here to Sweden!"

By the mightiest hunter and best man of his hands he meant himself, and the boast was not an idle one. Sigurd Stag was a

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man in the best years of life, well over six feet tall, marvelously muscled, with wide, massive shoulders and a chest as deep as a war-drum. It was said, and with justice, that he was also the handsomest man in Norway.

His eyes were large and fiercely blue, his features nobly made, and his cheeks still smooth and pink as those of a youth twenty years younger. His glowing red beard sprang out in little curls on his temples, swept down in twin cataracts over the crag-like cheek-bones, and surged together at the chin like two mountain-torrents partly stemmed by his long mustaches. With a little of the instinct of the dandy, he had managed to shield his face well in the many fierce fights of his adventurous life, and not a scar broke the surface of his healthy skin.

The tumult of laughter and applause was broken off suddenly, and the room became so swiftly silent that the echo of the men's voices rang ghostly in the rafters. The hiss and crackle of the great hall-fire made itself heard anew, and even the rustling of the tapestried hangings over the drafty windows was distinctly audible. The light step of a woman sounded over the boards of the passage; and every man, even Sigurd himself, rose to his feet as Gunnhild entered.

The amazing stature and beauty of the girl, and the mingling of reverence and awe in which the hard-bitten Northern warriors held her, might well have lent color to the superstition of the forest-dwellers about Ringariki that Gunnhild was no mere mortal girl, but the daughter of a Valkyr. She was taller than most men; her arms, bare to the elbows even in Winter, combined the round beauty of girlhood with the size and firmness of a champion's arms.

Broader of shoulder than other women, she was yet lithe and graceful, and possessed both strength and lightness to an unusual degree. Her face was as remarkable as her figure: broad of forehead, with thick, smooth eyebrows and long, heavy lashes. Her complexion was in contrast, and yet in harmony with her dark beauty of eyes and hair: cheeks of a clear natural whiteness had won, by exercise in the open, a rich redness of color which shone warmly through a healthy tan.

Her eyes were of a large, full blackness, that seemed as deep as a black mountain lake; and the redness of her chiseled lips was like that of holly-berries. The sable masses of her hair, the nobility of her features, might be described; but the fine, untamed spirit which animated and pervaded her every motion and gave strength and purpose to her face was beyond the powers of even the vivid verse in which Hornklofi, the greatest of skalds, sought to imprison it.

She looked a princess, for all the simplicity, the very rusticity, of her dress. A plain, full robe of gray wool, gathered at the waist by a leather girdle; a dark blue cape of the same weave flung over her shoulders and caught with a silver brooch: the garb of a well-to-do farmer's daughter.

Only two distinctive touches indicated the girl's uncommon birth and character: the two dark braids which fell over her cape and down almost to her knees had intertwined with them a thin, gleaming line of red silk, costly beyond estimate in the North; and her plain, rough girdle had a finely wrought golden clasp, from which a broad, jewel-headed dagger hung over her right hip.

King Sigurd of Ringariki stepped down from his carved high seat, and took her by the hand.

"I have sent for you," he began; and then changed the form of his address. "I have asked you to come, Gunnhild, that you might do honor to our Yule Feast by offering, in my stead, the Winter Sacrifice to Odin, Thor, and Tyr. My people believe that the gods will listen to your prayers sooner even than to mine, and that good seasons and successful hunting will be the result. Will you take the horn?"

SHE nodded, and he led her to the high seat. He filled the massive horn himself, climbed the steps to the throne, and gave her the cup. Gunnhild held it in both hands, her arms outstretched before her, and in a rich, clear voice repeated the formula of the invocation to the three high gods. Then, raising the horn to her lips she cried:

"To thee, Odin, God of the Slain and of Battles; to thee, Thor, God of Good Harvests and of Valor; to thee, Tyr, God of Victory, we drink this cup! Accept the sacrifice!"

She sipped a mouthful of the ale, and handed the horn to Sigurd, who, sipping in his turn, gave it to the nearest warrior. Down one bench and up the other it passed, till all had fulfilled the rite. Then, stepping down from the dais, Gunnhild walked

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over to the unwieldy wall-chest of smoke-blackened oak, took out a number of wooden cups, and passed them to the impatient men.

Eager for the liquor as they were, they were restrained by her presence, and took their turns at the cask. The servants entered, bearing boards and trestles, and swiftly erected and laid the tables for the feast. In a few moments an abundance of good cheer smoked and steamed upon the tables; and the warriors, squirming uneasily upon their benches, cast impatient glances at each other or played with their emptied cups, waiting for Gunnhild and Sigurd to seat themselves.

And now, the two having taken their places, the men squared themselves for action. Sigurd, carving the roasted horse-flesh, filled the beechwood bowls, and poured in the rich gravy. Plates of the same material he heaped with seethed kid and the flesh of fattened pigs, and passed bowls and plates to Buri, who appeared silently just in time for this service.

Gunnhild, of course, was served first; then each of the warriors in the order of his importance. Gunnarr, the boy, filled the wooden flagons from the cask, and saw that no one lacked drink. A mighty sound of moving jaws and of the guzzling of ale arose; hardly a word was spoken until the keen edge of hunger was appeased.

At last, the cups having been refilled, Sigurd waved his hand.

"Eat, knaves," he said; and the servants, seating themselves at the table farthest from the fire, took their turn at the feast.

Gunnarr, however, as befitted the brother of Gunnhild and the foster-son of Sigurd Stag, took the place of Hawk, who rose to make way for him and filled his place as cup-bearer.

"Now, Garm!" cried the king; and a huge wolfhound rose from the further side of the fire, walked around the hearth, and stalked, with imperious dignity, to Sigurd's seat. "Catch!" ordered the monarch; the dog threw back his head with a swift twist, and deftly caught a huge gobbet of horse-meat. "Again!" and the trick was repeated until the dog's hunger was satisfied, when he stretched himself out behind his master's chair.

Sigurd rose to his feet, and signed to Hawk to replenish the flagons. When this was done, he raised the splendid drinking-horn, and cried, in a voice that rang with feeling:

"Men of Ringariki, it is more than twenty years since you first chose me to be your king. Perhaps I merited the title, as the descendant of Ragnarr Lodbrok. At least, you chose me, and I have ruled my little kingdom well, I think."

The warriors raised hoarse shouts of approbation; but Sigurd checked them with a gesture.

"We have been in many fights together, and in all that score of years we have never known defeat. We have been good comrades. When Halfdan the Black rose to be king in Agdir, I recognized him as lawful sovereign, by birth and right, of all Norway, and I did homage to him for my little land of Ringariki. One district after another he won; and of my small band of fighting-men, fully a third have died in his battles.

"Now Halfdan rules over seven districts; and, if Odin spares him, it may chance that he will bequeath to his son Harald nearly half of Norway. The petty kings have either submitted to him or been put down. We have always been faithful to him, for we love our land, and desire to see it united and strong again, as it was in the days of his ancestors. Men, I bid you drink to Halfdan the Black, king of a new and great Norway!"

With a wild shout, the warriors raised their flagons; but before the wet rims touched their lips, the dog Garm sprang to his feet, every hair bristling, and gave forth a deep, resonant bass growl, that rose and fell like muttering thunder. All paused, the cups still half-way to their mouths, and made as if to reach out to the walls, where hung their round shields and heavy swords.

Sigurd, however, maintained his self-command, and bade them remain quiet. He turned toward the door, laid his hand on the dog's leathern collar, and waited, listening. Garm was quivering with excitement and fury, but became quiet, for the moment, under his master's hand.

A moment more, and there came two dull thumps against the outer wall, the sound of a man knocking off the snow from his snow-shoes. Garm, no longer to be restrained, tugged furiously against the king's detaining hand, his cavernous throat rumbling, and his teeth set in a furious snarl. The door swung open, and a man entered the hall.

As the newcomer raised his face to the

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light of the pine-torches, Sigurd twisted the dog's collar, shutting off its breath, till the beast crouched submissively at his feet. But on the face of every man there, excepting only the intruder and Sigurd himself, a fierce, almost murderous resentment showed. Gunnhild sat silent and composed, with no sign of emotion on her well-controlled features.

When the newcomer had shaken the powdery snow from the folds of his cloak, Sigurd courteously thrust the ale-horn into his hand, and bade Gunnarr make room for him on the bench.

"Little though I expected this visit, Haki," he began, "you are welcome to my hall and my table, and doubly welcome at Yule. We were about to drink a health when you came in. As a brave man and a Norwegian, you will be glad to drink it with us. Once more, lads, to our king! Halfdan the Black! Skoal!"

Again, though this time with less spontaneity, the flagons were raised; but again they were halted half-way to the drinkers' lips; for Haki, with an expression in which malice and an evil joy were blended, dashed his cup to the floor.

"That toast is unlucky," he answered. "Halfdan is dead."

CHAPTER III

THE WOLF IS BALKED

"DEAD!"

The cry burst from a dozen lips at once. The bearded warriors threw their cups clattering down upon the planks, regardless of the good ale that ran in muddy rivulets across the floor; and all crowded round the messenger of evil tidings, their eyes seeking to draw the story from his.

And well they might have looked at him, if he had had no bitter news to tell; for surely an uglier man was never seen. He was even taller than Sigurd, but very ill-formed, as if Nature had marred him in the making. A twisted torso set on preternaturally long and bowed legs, one of which was shorter than the other; a lean, corded neck, badly awry, was topped by a head incredibly brutal and animal-like.

His skull was flattened at the back and conical at the top; he had almost no forehead, and his matted tawny hair straggled down over his evil red eyes—little eyes, bloodshot and baleful, but steady. His nose, which had been broken by some old wound, jutted out and down at right angles with itself, and curved like a beak over his thin and writhing lips. No hair grew on his face, which was seamed and scored with the mark of every evil passion. No man could look upon him without hating him; but no man who ever saw those eyes would have called him a coward. Most men would have feared him, too, for the threat of the terrible face was rendered potent by the burly, knotted arms, whose power showed even through the thick sleeves of his half-cloak.

Sigurd grasped him by the shoulder.

"Halfdan dead!" he repeated in incredulous horror. "Man, it is impossible! Only yesterday his shield-bearer stopped here for meat and drink on his way to rejoin the king at Rand, and reported him well and in good spirits."

"Aye, and so he was yesterday," Haki rejoined. "Tonight he is drinking mead with the gods. He left Rand this morning, after an all night's drinking-bout in Hadeland. His way led him over the bight of Rykinsvik, where a hole had been chopped in the ice for cattle to drink. The ice had frozen ill, and snow fell during the night, covering the water-hole. As Halfdan drove over the thin ice, his horses broke through, and dragged him and four good men-at-arms in after him. His body was taken out, but his soul had fled to Odin."

"Worse tidings have never come to my ears!" Sigurd exclaimed. "I have lost a good lord, and Norway's best hope is wrecked."

"Wrecked it is," Haki answered; and his red eyes flickered, as though the thought brought him no great sorrow. "It will be a merry day for the little kings, however. I marvel that you grieve at it, Sigurd, seeing that a strong man may gain much for the mere stretching out of his arm, now that the old bear is dead."

A threatening growl rose from the loyal thanes of Ringariki, and as if in answer, the dog Garm rumbled fiercely in his throat.

"My men and I do not relish such thoughts, Haki," Sigurd observed in even tones. "And the old bear—" here his blue eyes flashed at the little red ones—"has left a cub behind, remember!"

"Aye, a cub of few Winters. Think you that the little kings will get down on their

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knees to young Harald? It is their turn now, and the cub will be lucky if he is not hunted into the forest. But I see that there is still meat and drink left on your table, Sigurd; and if you will give me leave, I will eat, seeing that I left Hadeland while the king's carcass was still wet, and traveled until this moment to bring you the news. It was hard going, too, for at noon the snow began to fall in sheets. I had to snatch a pair of snow-shoes from a woodman when I got out of the forest, and he was loath to part with them, I tell you."

And without another word Haki helped himself to a huge horse-steak, picked up Sigurd's horn from the floor, signed to Hawk to fill it, and fell to. For a quarter of an hour he said no word, while his jaws champed incessantly. All the others were silent too, for the joy had fallen from their hearts, and they liked their guest little better than his news.

At last he turned, straddled the bench, and addressed the king.

"I have a word for your ear, Sigurd," he announced, glancing out of the corner of his eye at the sullen company of warriors. "Call off your dogs, for my errand is not for them. Let the girl stay, though, since the matter concerns her."

"Go, lads," Sigurd admonished his men. "There is little joy here now, and you were best in bed."

Slowly and gloomily the warriors filed out by the hall-door, into the cold, and their muffled feet were heard mounting the snowy outside stairs to the back loft where they slept.

The king sank into the bench beside Haki, and turned to face his guest. Gunnhild still sat in her own seat, her face impassive but alert.

"Now then," urged Sigurd.

"Stag," the other began, readily enough, "you are at bay."

Sigurd raised his eyebrows, but said never a word.

"For twenty years," Haki resumed, "you have ranged your little forest kingdom, found good grazing, and fought all who would have disputed your feeding-ground. When Halfdan rose, you declared for him. The other little kings do not love you for that. Now Halfdan is dead, and the little kings prepare to go hunting. First they will hunt the cub Harald; then they will remember you, and will hunt the stag. You are one, and the hunters are many. What will you do?"

"I will save them the trouble of two huntings," Sigurd answered. "The stag will join the bear-cub, and give the little kings a merry hunt. Harald will need faithful hearts—" he smiled a little at his own pun—"and here is one that knows how to be faithful."

"But Harald's following is few," Haki objected, "and he has no gold. None will remain true to him but his own house-carles and a handful of fools who like fighting better than winning."

"Guthorm is with him."

"Aye, but Guthorm is his mother's brother, and shrewd though he is, can see no farther than the ties of kinship."

"Guthorm is a host in himself," Sigurd rejoined. "In his hands, fifty men make a strong army, and his wisdom is as that of Odin himself. Now I have few enough. Twoscore of my men are already with Guthorm, and the scant handful that you saw here are all that remain. Still, if I march with them to Westfold and join Harald, I think there are few chiefs in Norway will care to bar the path of Sigurd Stag."

"That is true," the other answered. "Men still remember how you, as a mere boy of twelve Winters, slew the berserk Hildibrand and his eleven comrades, one after the other. Consider, however, that the odds will be more than twelve to one if you take Harald's part. Hogni and Frodi, the sons of Eysteinn of Hedemark, will rise against him; King Gandalf of Vingulmark was in arms a month ago, purposing to make war on Westfold as soon as Halfdan should come to Hadeland.

"He was harrying the borders not four days past, and Guthorm will have enough to do to hold him only in check. Your neighbor Hogni Karuson has sent around the war-arrow—I passed his messengers on my way hither—and the chieftain Gudbrand is making preparations in the Dales. Take all the men Guthorm and Harald can scrape together, add your own tiny band, and multiply the whole by ten; the total sum would not hold off the five kings for a month."

"In which case I shall be slain," mused Sigurd. "But if I refuse Harald my aid, and hide in my own forests, the Five Kings will not forget the harms I have done them

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in Halfdan's service, and I shall be slain anyhow."

He thought a moment, then turned to Haki, his face quiet and impassive.

"You are a man of wisdom," he purred. "What do you advise me to do?"

The ruffian masked his triumphant grin with one sinewy hand, but he could not hide the gleam in his evil eyes.

"Why, look now," he exclaimed, with an affectation of frank bluffness, "I never knew you to show such sense, Sigurd. I can show you a way, aye, and a prosperous way, out of your plight. But first—" he shivered, and drew his short cloak more tightly about his shoulders—"we must have more fire. It's cold as Niflhel."

IT WAS cold. The great, drafty room, except for a small space about the fire-pit, was filled with a biting chill, which oozed in around the door, through the hangings over the windows, and down through the smoke-hole; for the loft extended over only one end of the hall. Haki made himself quite free of his host's fuel, filling his corded arms with great billets from the wood-pile, and heaping these on the hearth till the flames rose and crackled hotly.

"For his kinship's sake, as you said, Guthorm is true to Harald. But how many men are bound even by kinship, in these wild times? Your own father, I am told, slew his brother-in-law for his treasure. When the Five Kings raise their standard openly, brother will arm against brother, son against father. Not all of Harald's kinsmen will be faithful to him."

"It is true," Sigurd mused, and quoted ancient lines:

> Brothers will strive, and slay each other,
> Own sisters' sons will sunder kinship;
> 'Tis evil on earth, ill-conduct triumphs:
> An ax-age, a sword-age, shields are cloven,
> A storm-age, a wolf-age, while the world totters;
> No man to others shows truth or mercy!

"Even so," Haki pursued. "When the issue is joined, I doubt whether your own house-thanes will not stab you as you sleep, for the sake of the gold of the Five Kings. But if you listen to my counsel, neither treachery nor the gold which buys it can harm you, for they will be on your side. I am high in the counsels of the Five Kings, and I promise you, in their name, safety and honor if you will leave Harald and make terms with them."

"It would seem prudent," Sigurd commented, hiding his thoughts under the cloak of impassivity. "But one thing is not clear. You have said that the Five Kings remember the services I rendered Halfdan against them. How, then, can they be induced to keep faith with me, if I desert Harald?"

Gunnhild sat biting her lips, and staring at her foster-father with a scarcely concealed, half-contemptuous surprise. His words deceived Haki too, for the conspirator at once abandoned all pretense.

"The kings have taken me into their confidence," he answered. "I have done great deeds for them, and they will grant me any reward I ask. Gandalf of Vingulmark came to me secretly, as soon as he heard of Halfdan's projected journey to Hadeland, and asked whether I, who haunted that district, could not find a way to dispose of the king.

"I replied that I both could and would, for it is twelve years since Halfdan outlawed me, and I have long borne him a grudge for it. Ever since, as you know, I have dwelt in the forests of Hadeland with a handful of desperate men, living by plunder, and going into hiding when the royal host came to hunt me out.

"Did it not seem strange to you that a water-hole should have been cut in the ice just where the Winter road meets the lake? Are men in the habit of watering their cattle in the road? Then why was it done this time, just when Halfdan must cross the lake at that particular point? Because I, Haki, knew that he would cross there, and it suited me that he should be drowned. He put himself into my hands when he came into my forests.

"I did more than this. Having learned from my men—who roam the wood-ways at all times—that Harald had been commanded to bring an army north to meet his father, and that the king planned a swift attack on Gandalf's capital at Oslo with that army, I left a token for Harald in the shape of Thord Gandalfsson's ax.

"By this time the boy has found the ax, thinks Thord slew his father, and will have turned back to wreak vengeance on Thord. Now Thord lies in ambush in Hakdale, with a force too strong for Harald's, and by this time the cub may be running into the trap.

"To make the outcome doubly sure, I

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shall send a messenger this very night to Oslo, where Gandalf, expecting an attack, waits with seven hundred men. I shall bid Gandalf march to the border between Vingulmark and Harald's land of Westfold, and wait there. In case Harald escapes Thord's ambuscade—which is unlikely—he will be weary with fighting and forced marches, and be easy picking for Gandalf's great host.

"So, you see, Harald will follow his father before another day is gone; and the Five Kings will give me anything I ask in return, even to granting you life and riches. They are to meet at midnight on the eve of the New Year, eight days hence, at Ringsakir in the Upland Forest. They will have few men with them, for it is not their purpose to attack Westfold, even with Harald dead, until they have made plans for the partition of Norway, and settled what each one shall have. I intend to be at the council, and will bring up the matter of granting peace to you."

"I see," Sigurd answered. "You are a shrewd fellow, Haki. Yes, you can protect me. But you and I have never been friends, so why should you do this for me? What will you gain by it?"

"By Thor! You are shrewd enough yourself. Of course I have something to gain—something you alone can give me. We have been foes ever since I came to these parts, and, starving with all my men, raided your sheepfold. I have not forgotten the vengeance you took for that. Eight battles have we fought, and you have always won. If I had not something to gain, I would leave you to your fate, or even kill you myself, if I could get you alone, as I have you now."

He undid the steel buckle which held his cloak together, cast one end of the garment over his left shoulder, and revealed, over a shirt of chain mail, a short sword girded under his armpit.

Sigurd's eyes flashed.

"If that is what you came for," he cried, "you may set to work when it pleases you. There is not a she-bear in all Ringariki that I could not kill, with my knife alone, in the presence of her cubs. I wear that knife now, and I do not fear a wolf of the wood like you. Therefore, if you have any proposal for my ear, as you say you have, speak it quickly, and be done. If not, draw, and settle the matter."

Haki laughed in his throat.

"I am not such a fool as to face Sigurd Stag without men to back me," he chuckled. "I spoke only to show you that I act out of self-interest, and not for any love of you. This is what I ask in exchange for my protection. This girl here has taken my fancy. More than a year ago, as I was prowling about your palisade, I saw her break the fiery black horse that Halfdan gave you. I am told that horse killed three men; yet she tamed him.

"It came into my mind then and there that she would make me a good mate. If I had not feared your vengeance, I might have stolen her then. Give her to me to be my wife, and I will use my influence to save you."

Gunnhild half rose, her cheeks scarlet with angry shame; but Sigurd's foot, softly stealing to hers under the table, enjoined silence.

"It is a hard thing you ask of me, Haki," he mused. "She is of too high birth for you. It is not commonly known, but Gunnhild is the daughter of my old comrade Erik, King in Hordaland till he was murdered by Eysteinn."

"I know that," the outlaw interposed. "I have spies in Hordaland."

"Since she is of royal blood, and not my own daughter, I can not limit her choice," Sigurd resumed. "It will be best to leave the matter to her. Gunnhild, will you marry this man, and save your foster-father's life?"

There was a hard quality in his voice, not the least trace of appeal.

GUNNHILD leaped from the bench with flashing eyes.

"It had been a happy day for me, my father," she stormed, "if you had given this fellow an answer out of your own lips, and sent him off with the contempt he deserves. Since you force me to answer for myself, this is my reply: I would take to husband the meanest thrall in Ringariki before I would have my name coupled with that of a traitor, a king-slayer, a bully, a berserk!"

She fairly spat out the last word, than which there was no more biting term of reproach in the language.

"Twelve years you have been an outlaw, a wolf in the wood, oppressing the helpless, plundering the poor, stealing maidens and peasants' wives, and winning great battles

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over your neighbors' cattle. Not to save Sigurd's life would I marry you, no, not to save King Harald's own!"

Sigurd also rose and laid his hand on his knife.

"You have your answer," he said sternly. "Now go quickly, before I let my thoughts dwell on drowned Halfdan, and slay you!"

The baffled outlaw got up, but instead of going, he began to fawn on Sigurd, and cringed before him.

"Do not send me out into the storm!" he begged. "Let me sleep in your hall to-night. It is snowing hard, and I shall perish."

"What?" Sigurd roared. "Give you a couch here, and have you stab me in my sleep? Look, murderer; when you came here unbidden, I welcomed you, gave you food and drink, for I do not refuse my hospitality to any man who comes in night and storm. But now, after what your own lips have told me——!"

He strode to the door, and threw it open.

"Look!" he commanded.

Haki obeyed, and saw the sky clear and bright, with gleaming stars. The storm had passed off, and it was fair and cold.

Sigurd laid a hand on his shoulder, and thrust him out. Once outside, Haki turned to snarl, like the wolf he was.

"Keep your watch well!" he hissed through writhing lips. "I go to the council of the kings; when I return, I will take the girl by force, and the red cock shall crow over your hall-gables!"

Sigurd shut the door in his face, and turned to Gunnhild.

"You answered well," he said proudly. "I feel shame when I think how I pretended to play his game. The messenger he spoke of is probably not far off; Haki will send him at once to warn Gandalf and the rest of the Five Kings that I know their plans, and to bid Gandalf march to head off Harald at once. There are two ways by which Harald may come, but only one by which that messenger of Haki's can get to Gandalf. The man must be stopped; but who will stop him? I need every man I have, in case the Wolf changes his mind and strikes at once. He has threescore men; I, but twenty. Counsel me, Gunnhild, for you are wise."

"Will you abide by my advice?" she asked quickly.

"Aye."

"Swear it."

"By Odin, Thor, and Tyr," Sigurd, complied, "by the oath which must not be broken, I swear it! The Snaky Hell is for him who breaks his oath."

"Then send me. I am swift of foot, and used to the trail. You have no man who can bear hardship better. I will take a throwing spear with me. You know how sure my aim is."

Sigurd stared at her, aghast.

"But you are a girl!" he protested. "You will have to do with a strong man, and a desperate. You are my foster-child, whom I promised to cherish, the eldest child of the murdered Erik; and I have hoped, sometime, to establish you in your right in Hordaland. To risk all this on a night encounter!"

Gunnhild looked steadily into his eyes, her own blazing.

"You have sworn," she reminded him. "The Snaky Hell is for him who breaks his oath!"

With a groan, Sigurd turned away. After a moment he looked round to her again, and said:

"Haki's man must take the main trail to Oslo in Vingulmark, to get word to Gandalf first of all. Lie in wait for him at Frey's Grove, where the trees are thick on each side of the road. Take care not to miss your mark, for you can not stand against a hardened warrior, hand to hand. Go quickly!"

Gunnhild nodded, and passed into the adjoining room. Almost immediately she returned, wrapped in a thick blue cloak, a cap of fox fur over her head and ears, and gloves of the same material on her hands. She had cast aside her gown for a man's coat and thong-wound trousers, and carried a pair of snow-shoes in one hand and a short, broad-headed spear in the other. Flinging open the door by which Haki had passed out, she sat down on the wide wooden threshold and bound on the snow-shoes.

"Farewell," she said, and, wrapping the folds of her cloak about her mouth, she strode swiftly into the darkness.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEAR-CUB

AS GUNNHILD crossed the little arm of the lake which clasped her foster-father's hall and garth between its two horn-like bays, the howl of a wolf cut through the

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silence, far away but clear. Once, twice, then three times in swift succession came the cry. While she listened, the howling was repeated, in precisely the same odd succession; then, after a moment's silence, it was answered from another direction: once, twice, then three times.

Then she understood. There was no wolf alive that howled like that, and none which would answer in the same manner. It was the cry of human wolves, of the "wolves of the wood," the outlaws. It was the signal of Haki to his men, and the signal had been answered!

The berserks, more brutal than the beasts, arrogated to themselves as much as they could of the manner of the savage animals to which law and popular belief likened them; they lived in the forest, hunted in packs, wore wolf-skin cloaks, lashed themselves into fighting fury by biting their shield-rims and foaming at the mouth, and called to one another through night and distance with the voice of the wolf.

Sigurd was right; there was need for the utmost haste. Of course Haki had his messenger waiting, posted a safe distance from the hall, and was even now calling him. Another quarter of an hour, and the swiftest rascal in Haki's band would be making for Oslo, the residence of Gandalf of Vingulmark! And if he should reach Frey's Grove, fifteen scant miles away, before she could cut him off, the Five Kings would learn that Sigurd, Harald's ally, knew of their appointed meeting, and Gandalf would thrust his forces between Harald and safety.

Straight across the snow-covered fields she dashed, in a fierce resolve to put as much distance as possible between herself and her intended victim. For full three miles her hardened muscles and deep young chest carried her at top speed toward the appointed spot, before the quick pain at the intake of each breath warned her that she was exhausting her strength. She stopped and looked back; the berserk was not in sight.

The moon rose as she rested, and illumined the vast snow-blanket all about her for mile on mile of white, gleaming plain. Now peering into its light behind her, she made out a small black blob on the glistening surface, and turning her face southeast again, she struck into an easy, regular stride.

Mile after mile the plain slipped behind, and still she maintained that steady pace. Sure that her strong limbs would keep her in the lead, she never looked back now, but thrust her chin forward with determined confidence. Of course the messenger must have seen her, as she had seen him, but she did not care. A plan had developed while she was resting in the moonlight, and not once did she doubt its success.

There was no need to search for the road, a mere wagon-track even in Summer, and now so muffled with the drifted snow as to be indistinguishable from the rest of the plain. She had only to follow the long, narrow bed of the lake to her right, which lay deep cut, like a sword-slash in the flat earth. It marked her way to within two miles of Frey's Grove; and at its end, she knew the road met the base of a low range of hills that sprawled to Oslo Fjord.

Half an hour more, and she saw those hills rolling away to the eastward. Toward them she sped, gradually increasing her pace, until she came to the foot of the first. Now at full speed she raced, for through the ravine-like valley between it and the second rise lay the direct road to Oslo, and half-way through the valley was Frey's Grove and the deserted shrine of the god. Ten minutes more, and she crouched behind a thick-stemmed pine on the outskirts of the grove.

She waited, panting, and scanned the road in front of her hiding-place. Fifteen, twenty, twenty-five minutes passed by, and that for which she waited did not appear. Her breath had come back again now, but the warmth induced by her exercise was going, and she felt chilled. Nevertheless she cast her cloak from her, and placed it behind her, where it would not show against the snow. She was about eight yards from the road, and did not want to be encumbered by the folds of her cloak when the time came.

Now, full against the glare of moon on snow, a black shape swept from behind the corner of the hill into the valley. She raised her right arm, poising the heavy-bladed hunting-spear, and gave the wolf-howl as Haki had given it. The swift-footed shape in the road slowed, stopped, and turned to face her, the moonlight flashing on his chain-mail. As he stood, a splendid target, her arm shot forward.

Thud! the spear crashed against the

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woven rings of steel, and stood out stiffly from his breast. The man staggered back; then, straightening, he flung his arms wide, and with one terrible scream, fell on his left side in the snow. As he lay there, the moonlight glittered on the sharp point sticking out between his shoulder-blades.

The girl sprang up and ran to him. He was stone-dead.

"A good cast," she commented.

Not a touch of regret troubled her mind; she was rather elated at her success and at the proof of her strength. This man was a berserk, a wild beast, such as every honest man killed without compunction.

One glance at the six inches of blade sticking out of his back showed her that it was hopeless for her to attempt to recover her spear. It would take even stronger arms than hers to pull it out. She shrugged her shoulders, and started back toward Ringariki. Before she had gone fifty yards, there came to her sensitive ear a commingled sound as of creaking wood, jingling metal, and the rise and fall of voices.

SWIFTLY her eyes swept the ravine to right and left, seeking cover; but the grove lay behind her, and not even a bush showed on the other side. As fast as her feet would carry her, she darted back toward the wood, and stopped only when she was almost up to the full-flung body of the outlaw. Once more she sought the bole of the great pine; but not feeling safe there, she crawled a few yards farther back to the shelter of the grove itself.

The sounds she had heard could have been made only by the approach of armed men, many men, with a wagon-train. The creaking wood was the noise of their axles; the jingle, that of their mail-shirts, beaten by the shields on their backs and the hilts of their swords. She knew they would see her track, and they could follow her if they would. The dead man in the road would give them a good reason for following her.

But she trusted in her speed, and in the blackness of the grove. She would run through it over the hill, skirt the range, and strike the road home on the other side. The approaching host was encumbered by their wagons, and a detachment would not wander far from the main body to pursue a single fugitive.

Slowly, keeping time with the laboring wagons, the host drew nearer and nearer. In a little while Gunnhild could hear, very plainly, the sounds which had been faint before. A few minutes more of anxious waiting, and the mouth of the road was filled with men. All she could see were on foot, except two who rode, on horses that floundered in the snow, at the head. It was these two whose voices she had heard. One was speaking loudly and angrily, the other answering in full, but more persuasive tones.

"I tell you I will not turn back!" the angry voice asserted. "Be the danger what it will. My father was foully murdered, and I will not return until I have nailed his slayer to the gable of his own hall!"

"I do not dispute that Gandalf urged his son to do the murder," the other patiently replied. "I am as sure as you are that he is at the bottom of it. But bethink you, Harald, that we are almost in Gandalf's country. If he instigated the murder, he knew as well as Thord did that Halfdan had sent for us, and purposed an attack on Oslo. The drowning was timed perfectly.

"I am sure that Gandalf himself sent his son to ambush us; and, knowing that battles do not always come out as they are planned, he has certainly considered the possibility of our defeating Thord as we did, and, expecting us to attack Oslo in retaliation, will be awaiting us there with a great army. Even if we disappoint him in that, he still has us; for he can cross the fjord and cut us off before we can round its elbow into Westfold."

"Suppose he is waiting for us," the angry voice retorted. "If he is in Oslo, what better chance will I ever have to meet him face to face, and wreak my vengeance on him?"

"Or he to wreak his on you?" the other insisted. "We are two hundred and forty sound men and half a hundred wounded. We are weary with fighting, and with marching in the snow. He is fresh and hale, supported by a numerous host, and thirsting to avenge his son Thord, whom you sent to the gods today. Be satisfied with the son's death for now, nephew. If you will not regard your own life, regard ours. Your house-carles are too good men to be thrown away."

There was no answer for a moment; then: "Halt!" rang the voice of Harald. The whole troop wavered, then surged, like a breaking wave, to a stop. He who was

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called Harald turned to his companions.

"You are right, Guthorm, as you always are. Forgive my anger, and remember only that I am overwrought with grief, and not myself. It is your counsel that we turn back. Well, let us do so. But whither? All behind us lies hostile country, and the war-arrows will have gone forth in every countryside so soon as we passed through."

"Fifteen miles to the northwest lies the garth of Sigurd Stag," Guthorm replied. "He was your father's loyal friend, and he will be loyal to you. I can answer for him. Twoscore of his men are guarding your estate at Tunsberg in Westfold, and he has a score more at Ringariki. With them, and what we have, we could hold out, at the worst, until Thorhall can come to our aid from Tunsberg. But I think no one will attack us in Ringariki, for Sigurd is known as a terrible man to oppose."

"Good. We will visit Sigurd. But wait; is not this Frey's Grove? Bide here until I go to the shrine and pay reverence to the god."

Harald strode off; but in a moment he stopped short, bent down to something in the road, and cried aloud:

"Guthorm! Here is a slain man! I said those tracks meant something!"

Guthorm hastened up, looked down at that which lay in the snow, turned it over, and put his hand to the wounded breast.

"By the hand of Tyr!" he swore softly. "He has not been dead an hour. Strange business! Tracks of two men leading hither; the track of one of them, you remember, going back; we saw it as we came. That last track stopped, and returned. Ha! it goes up the hill yonder! Vingnir! Haste hither, and follow this track into the copse! Bring back him you find hiding there!"

GUNNHILD stepped forth from the shelter of the grove.

"There is no need," she said, in full, clear tones. "I slew the man, and for your sake, my king!"

She spread out her hands, to show that she was unarmed, and slowly descended the slope toward Guthorm and Harald. The two stared up at her, the moonlight revealing the astonishment on their faces. Harald stepped forward to meet her, and laid his hand on her shoulder. Her cloak once more muffled about her face, her tall figure swathed in it and in her heavy trousers, the king quite naturally took her for the man she appeared, the more readily because of her stature, and because of that which lay at their feet.

"Who are you, fellow, and why do you put your man-slaying onto us?" the king sternly questioned her.

Gunnhild looked steadily back at him, noting the broad, shapely shoulders, the proud carriage of his young head, the handsome, unbearded face, and the fine brilliance of his lion's eyes. She required no second sight to convince her that, lad of twenty as he was, he would make a man every jot as great as his father had been.

"I am from Ringariki," she evaded. "Sigurd Stag heard of King Halfdan's murder from the lips of his slayer not six hours ago, and learned also of other things affecting the safety of your kingdom. He despatched me to waylay the murderer's messenger, who bore words of treason for your enemies. I watched for the man here, with the results which you see."

She paused, and scanning his face to note the reception of her words, she found, for the first time in her life, that here was a man whose eyes she could not brave. Her own lost their triumphant glow, wavered, and fell. Harald, never relaxing the cold sternness of his gaze, renewed his questions.

"My father's murderer, you say? Who is he? His name?"

"Haki the berserk, my lord. Haki the outlaw, who infests the forest of Hadeland. He was set on by Gandalf of Vingulmark."

"I knew it!" cried Harald, with a fierce bitterness that made his words terrible. "And I must let this crime go unpunished! I must wait for strength, while the murderer walks the earth in safety, in triumph! But you, fellow—" his gaze sought Gunnhild's again—"what were the words of treason which you say this dead dog here bore for my enemies?"

"This, my king."

And word for word, Gunnhild told of the visit of Haki to Sigurd Stag, forgetting not the smallest particular of the berserk's proposals, but always speaking of herself in the third person. As he listened to her account of the Five Kings and their treachery, Harald's eyes took on the gleam of blue steel, flashing like twin swords in the frosty light of the growing dawn.

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When she had finished the story of the meeting which the conspirators planned for the midnight of one week hence, and had shown how, by slaying the messenger of Haki, she had prevented word from reaching them that their intentions were known, and had saved Harald's own life, she looked proudly at Harald, meeting the approval in his eyes.

"You have done well," he told her; then to his uncle, "Guthorm," he said—and the madness of anger was wiped clean from his face, leaving only the steady light of a wise and determined purpose—"we will not visit Sigurd tonight. We will march back through the western end of Hadeland, past the bight of Rykinsvik at Rand Water where my father was murdered, and straight into the Uplands.

"We go north even to the wood opposite Skog. There, we will cross the Miors Water. We will hide in the forest between Skog and Ringsakir. It is four days' march from here to Skog, but we will break the march at Shiftsand, and leave the wounded in camp there, under guard."

Here Gunnhild interrupted.

"By your leave, my king," she urged, "it will lighten your march, and make easier the task of finding provisions for your host, if you send the wounded back to Ringariki with me. I will guide them safely; and once in Sigurd's hall, few will dare the anger of the Stag to come at them."

Harald smiled now, for the first time; and it was a winning smile that he bent on her.

"It is a kind offer," he answered, "and wisely thought. You do not speak like a mere warrior; yet you give me to understand you are Sigurd's servant."

"He is my foster-father, sir," she told him.

"He has a good child, then, and you are well brought up. You are kind of thought, loyal, swift of action, and strong of arm. Sigurd should be proud of you."

Then, addressing Guthorm again, he continued his order:

"We will give the men a day's rest at Shiftsand. The wagons, of course, will be sent with the wounded to Sigurd Stag. That will make it five days from now when we arrive at Skog. It will be easy to pick up provisions on the way. True, the war-arrow will have gone round all the way ahead of us, but the hosts levied against us will be sent down the Raum River to Vingulmark, and we shall not even see them. No one will expect that we dare to return, and Gandalf will draw every available man south for an attack on Westfold as soon as he returns from the meeting at Ringsakir. And from that meeting I swear he shall never return!

"We will meet with no resistance, then, since we are not looked for. We will plunder every farm we pass through. Once at Skog, we lie hidden in the forest until New Year's Eve. Four hours after sunset of that day, we steal down upon the meeting-place. It is but five miles, and we should arrive while the traitors are still wrangling over the spoils. Then—oh, spirit of my father, thou shalt indeed be avenged!"

It broke from his throat in a fierce, half-sobbing cry. For a moment he paused; then, his emotion under control, he asked of Guthorm—

"Is it wisely spoken?"

"Very wisely," the other answered. "Unless, while passing through Hadeland, we meet Haki and his berserks."

"Then it is wise in all respects. For the chances are that Haki will not send his men south to Oslo, as Sigurd expected, but to Ringsakir, for he alone, of all the traitors, has no claim of any sort to one foot of my realm. His influence with the Five Kings is such as proceeds from my father's murder, and the patronage of Gandalf.

"Gandalf will keep Haki and all his men close by himself, for they are greatly feared, and their presence at Ringsakir will overawe the other kings into giving Gandalf the lion's share. The berserk is Gandalf's bully, and will be where his master needs him. But if I mistake, and we do meet him, then I will pay him first, and his master afterward."

Then, laying his hand again on Gunnhild's shoulder, but gently this time, he said:

"We go now; farewell. Take good care of my wounded. When I return from hanging traitors, I will visit Sigurd, and pay him thanks for his loyal faith. Nor will I forget you either, foster-child of Sigurd. For an earnest of my gratitude, take this."

He unwound the spiral bracelet of heavy gold from his upper arm, and offered it to Gunnhild. But she, shaking her head, said, greatly daring:

"I would have a greater gift. You have something which I prize more than gold."

"Name it."

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"Give me your sword."

Harald laughed in his throat, and shook his head.

"Not this time, lad," he told her. "I need it. When I come to Sigurd's hall, I will give it to you, for you have earned it. And here——"

He set his foot on the freezing corpse of the outlaw, grasped the spear, and with one mighty wrench, pulled it out. "Here is your weapon. When I come, I will take it in exchange for the sword."

CHAPTER V

THE FIVE KINGS

"SO YOU see," Haki concluded, "down he went, splash! horses, house-carles, and all, into the wet trap I set for him. He will never trouble you again. As for his son, we can snap our fingers at him."

The berserk looked at each of the conspirators in turn, his hideous features twisted into a monstrous grin. Hogni, son of that Eysteinn who murdered Gunnhild's father, leaned eagerly forward toward him, both elbows on the heavy table. He was a thick-set young man, with a stubborn, sulky face.

His house had resisted Halfdan tooth and nail, until their once wide possessions had been narrowed to Hedemark, just this side of the Swedish border, and Hordaland, Gunnhild's heritage, in Western Norway. His younger brother Frodi, flaxen-haired and nervous, leaped to his feet in joyful excitement.

"Haki," he cried, "you are the prince of were-wolves, and your brains are as sharp as your sword!"

Impulsively he clasped Haki's hand in his, and shook it with vehemence. The outlaw, who had concealed Gandalf's part in the regicide, extricated himself from the young man's grasp, and turned his eyes to the head of the table, where sat the arch-traitor, Gandalf of Vingulmark himself. Neither said a word, but each looked understandingly at the other.

After an interval of silence, the chieftain Gudbrand raised his gangling length from his bench, and laid a hairy paw on the table. Stooped, pockmarked, and heavy of jowl and brow, he looked the dangerous malcontent he was. A restless, eating dissatisfaction had brought him into the ranks of the conspirators, whose equal he was neither in birth nor in estate.

They were glad of his fellowship, nonetheless, for five hundred wild Dalesmen followed his banner, and however without warrant, called him their king. He took the word now, feeling that longer silence would lessen his importance.

"Aye, it was well enough done," he mumbled. "And Haki is right in saying that young Harald will not trouble us. But his uncle, Guthorm, will. That man has even greater cunning than you, Haki; and being a thousand times more honest, men trust him. The men of Westfold will follow him as long as he has an ounce of silver or a promise left. If we would win swiftly and surely, we must get rid of him."

Gandalf, softly clearing his throat, intimated that he had something to say. As the most powerful of all the little kings, and the shrewdest, he commanded their attention whenever he spoke.

"Wrong, as always, Gudbrand. The ax is your weapon, not the tongue. Guthorm is the brain, but Harald is the arm, and the arm is heavy. I know, for I have felt it."

He paused, and every man at the table turned to look at him. His yellow eyes, contracted like a cat's, held theirs as by some irresistible inner force; his restless hands continually plucked at his bushy beard, or gesticulated with an almost Latin nervousness.

"Knowing, from my friend Haki here, that Halfdan had sent word to Guthorm, commanding him and Harald to come with three hundred men to the eastern shore of the Rand, and suspecting that their purpose was a raid on my own town of Oslo while they thought me in the south, I marched swiftly back to Oslo, and waited there with seven hundred men. Also, in the belief that Harald was a fool, and undervaluing Guthorm without Halfdan, I bade Haki find some means of putting Halfdan out of the way, which as you have heard, Haki did.

"What did I find? So soon as Harald learned of his father's slaying, the cub we all despised vowed vengeance. Then, luck being with him, he marched down through the western end of your territory, Hogni, arrived there before he was expected, and sprung my son Thord's ambush in Hakdale. Thord had four hundred stout fellows with him, but Harald thought little of the odds against him.

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"The result was that my son fell, and not threescore men-at-arms returned to Oslo to tell the tale. Then I was sure that Harald, made reckless by his victory, would attack Oslo, and throw himself into my trap. But the cunning Guthorm seems to have prevailed over him, for I waited at Oslo in vain. That was a week ago, and they are doubtless rejoicing in Westfold over my bereavement."

His face turned livid with hate, and the restless hands balled themselves into fists. Regaining his self-command, he resumed:

"The longer he stays in Westfold, the better for us. Thank the gods, he can hardly have knowledge of our plans yet. Haki, it is true, forgot his cunning for once, and told them to Sigurd Stag, but Sigurd would hardly dare act openly against us. One thing only troubles me; Haki sent a messenger to warn me that Sigurd was informed of this meeting, and the messenger never arrived. I learned of this only tonight, when I met Haki here.

"Still, it is six score good miles from Tunsberg to Ringsakir, and Harald would hardly dare risk himself that far into our territory, even if he had had time to raise a host and return hither, which he has not. I think we are safe for two weeks. In that time I can return to Oslo, equip a fleet and attack Westfold by sea. That will keep Harald busy, for he has few ships, and I will have command of the sea. As you know, there is no way out of Westfold to the south and east save by water.

"You, Hogni and Frodi, will send word to your father Eysteinn, bidding him march from Hordaland with all his host. That will close the western border, and your own men, advancing to the eastern end of the Hadeland forest, will find Haki and his berserks waiting there. You will join forces, and tarry until Gudbrand and his Dalesmen come down from the north; then you will proceed south together, until you reach the northern boundary of Westfold.

"Harald, whose entire force will be watching the coasts to keep me from landing, will not understand my failure to land until he gets word of your approach. Then he will be between the Wolf and the Midgard Serpent. From all sides we will close in on him, tightening the ring of steel until it binds him fast. Then—" his right hand imitating the closing of fingers around a throat—"all will be over."

For the first time that night, Hogni Eysteinsson spoke.

"Why, then," he blurted, "we may as well regard the game as won, and consider the distribution of the spoil."

Gandalf looked him full in the eyes, greatly to the Hedemarker's discomfiture.

"If I were you," he cautioned, "I would not count the spoil till the fighting is over."

But the sullen young man was not to be put off.

"It is all very well for you to talk of waiting, for you can afford to wait. As for me, my best lands have been overrun by Halfdan, and my halls looted, until I have barely enough treasure or grain left to keep my warriors from leaving me. Is it not so, Frodi?" he appealed to his brother.

Frodi nodded confirmation.

"We are all here together, and Thor knows when we shall have a fairer opportunity," Hogni insisted. "You have planned this matter from the beginning, Gandalf, and I have no doubt you mean to feather your own nest well. Now I want to know what the rest of us are to get out of it?"

His square jaw shot forward, and his stubborn face set in heavy lines.

"I had hoped to avoid disagreements among ourselves until the common enemy should be crushed," Gandalf sighed. "But since you do not mean it to be so, we might as well get the matter over with at once."

SLOWLY, as if in embarrassment, his hand plucked at his beard. Not until the rising color in Hogni's cheek warned him that the Hedemarker would brook no more delay, did he open his lips again.

"To begin, then," Gandalf spoke more briskly, as if his mind was made up, "I mean to have Westfold for myself."

"I expected that," growled Hogni. "Westfold is the best district in all Norway. What else?"

"Also, I must have Gautland and Vermland."

"You may have them for all of me. They are claimed by Erik of Sweden, and he will dispute them fiercely. What more?"

"Numdal, Ranrik, and all of Alfheimar south of the Raum River," Gandalf purred.

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"Son of a swine!" roared Hogni. "What is left for the rest of us?"

"I shall also take Raumrealm," the other concluded, and sat back in his chair, smiling gently to himself.

Hogni rose, his face flushed with anger, and never heeding that his chair crashed to the floor, walked over to the end of the table and thrust his fist under Gandalf's nose. Frodi also rose, though not so readily, and made as if to back up his brother.

"You take Raumrealm?" Hogni shouted. "You? Why, you rank thief, Raumrealm was snatched from my father by the Black One who is now dead, and by all the gods, I will suffer no man to keep me out of it now Halfdan is fallen! It was the most priceless of all our domains. You shall give it to me, or I will throw my bargain in your face and go over to Harald!"

Gandalf looked at the threatening fist as if it were some object of curiosity, and remarked mildly:

"You dare not. Harald will not receive you. He has sworn to make no peace with any of the house of Eysteinn, until the murder of Erik of Hordaland is avenged."

There was no answering this, and Hogni knew it. Being no fool, he choked down his fury as best he might, and asked—

"What is my share, then, if you take all this?"

"You," Gandalf replied gently, "are to have Alfheimar north of the Raum, Solisles, and the Eastern Dales."

Hogni turned livid again.

"You son of Loki!" he gasped. "The Eastern Dales are a waste land, Alfheimar should be mine entire, and Solisles is a swamp! Karuson," and he turned to his namesake, Hogni Karuson, who was Sigurd's neighbor on the western border of Ringariki, "and you, Gudbrand, will you endure the greed of this master-pig?"

Karuson looked up wearily.

"If I had more men, Hogni," he answered, "I should long ago have turned Sigurd Stag out-of-doors and seized his land. As it is, any man may have me who can buy me, and Gandalf has offered me all Ringariki and Hadeland, when Sigurd and his lord are overthrown."

"And as for Gudbrand," Gandalf smiled, "he is to get all the Dales west of the Eastern Dales, even to Southmere. You would get more also, Hogni, if you had greater power. But your insolence has so offended me that I withdraw North Alfheimar from your portion, and offer it to your brother Frodi.

Frodi raised his voice in loud protest.

"Not a foot of it will I have," he cried, "not one foot will I steal from my brother! Know, you greedy one, that I stand with Hogni in this matter, and we will force you to play fair with us!"

"And how do you think to do that?" Gandalf taunted.

Hogni, his square face ugly with passion, brought his big fist crashing down upon the table.

"Thus!" he roared. "You have brought but ten men with you. My brother and I, like Gudbrand and Karuson, have brought none, for all the land from here to Westfold is friendly to us. But there is one man here who has brought a host, and whom, for all his service to you, you do not own. Haki, keep your promise! Call your berserks, and seize this swine!"

Gandalf raised his face, still smiling, to Haki's. The ruffian leered at him, and winked once, but neither spoke nor stirred. Hogni, in sheer amazement, stood staring at the two. At last he understood, and turned on Haki.

"You dog!" he cried. "You swore to do what I bade you, and you have sold yourself to him!"

The berserk's smile vanished, and his red eyes flamed.

"You have said enough, Eysteinsson," he grated. "You offered me twenty pounds of silver; Gandalf trebled the offer, and promised, after Harald's death, to remove my sentence of outlawry, and make me Earl of Agdir beside. He outbid you, that is all. If a man must have a price, why not a high one?"

Gandalf broke in again:

"This comes of not understanding one another. Now, I mean that you shall understand me once and for all. Halfdan was too powerful and kept us lesser kings down; therefore we rise. I intend to make myself as powerful as Halfdan ever was, with this difference, that I shall put down only those who oppose me, or break faith with me. Those who are true to me I will reward generously. But I trust none of you.

"Gudbrand gets the largest share of the spoils, next to myself, for he has most men

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to offer me; but I have given him no outlet on the sea, for I do not intend that he shall ever rebel against me. Haki's lands will lie between Gudbrand's and mine. He has an outlet, because he boasts but one ship. Moreover, Hogni, his domains make him the natural rival of your father, and it is not likely that the two will ally themselves against me.

"You and your brother are the only ones here who have both the will to oppose me and a situation which threatens me. Therefore you get least, lest you should be able to raise a large host against me. Yet you dare not hold out until after Harald is dead; for you fear him. You will stand by me because you have no choice.

"I knew that you would practise some treachery as soon as you knew how little I intended to give you, and I knew Haki only would come here with a large following. Therefore I asked him, early tonight, how much you had offered him for the use of his fifty berserks, who are on guard, with my own ten, outside the door. He told me, and I bought him and his men. Now you will swear faith with me, or I will bid him call his bullies and carve you into small pieces."

As the last words left his lips, Haki threw back his head and sniffed.

"By Thor!" he cried, "I smell fire!" Hardly had he spoken, when a curl of smoke thrust its gray finger between the logs at the southwest corner of the hall. For an instant the kings stared at it; then, while it eddied about in a little draft, a tongue of flame followed it, and licked the tinder-dry timbers.

"THE door!" cried Gandalf, and ran to the northern end of the hall, the only means of egress except the two windows at the sides.

He had almost reached the doorway, when, like the yell of a madman, a cry of alarm burst from one of the guardsmen outside. As thunder follows lightning, the war-cry of the berserks echoed the startled sentry's shout. Then, clear and high, the sound of steel clashing against the metal boss of a shield, and overwhelming the wolf-howl of the berserks rang the surging peal of the Westfolders:

"Harald! Harald! Vengeance for Halfdan!"

Their faces livid, the Five Kings started back from the door; and with a common instinct they huddled together like frightened sheep. Haki gave one glance at the burning corner. The fire had spread, the crackle grew to a roar, the whole south wall was aflame. While they gazed, the fire and smoke poured in upon them, choking them. And ever the din of battle rose and beat about the door.

Haki strode to the eastern window, lifted the hanging ever so slightly, and peered out. A moment he gazed, then threw himself to the floor. And not a second too soon, for a javelin tore through the corner of the hanging where his head had been, and buried itself in the table-leg, with a crash and a splintering of wood.

"They are all about the house!" he cried. "Hear them? The fire was set first, for our rear was not guarded. They are thick as bees here; perchance they will be fewer on the other side. Draw your swords, and to the other window!"

The panic-stricken conspirators ran for the window, each striving to thrust the others aside. Gandalf, farthest from the wall, was last. As he elbowed Gudbrand, Haki seized him by the cloak and dragged him back.

"Stay, Gandalf!" he shouted. "You keep with me; let the others go where they will. My men are on this side—it is the best chance."

And stepping back, with his ax held before him, he threw the door wide. With Gandalf hanging to the tail of his cloak, he dashed out into the welter of clanging weapons, of shrieks of pain and cries of triumph, of trampling feet, reeking flesh, and flying brands. The rush of air from the opened door sucked a sheet of hungry flame after them, as if it reached avid fingers for them.

The others, believing themselves safer on the side farthest from the press of their foes, crowded each other at the window. Gudbrand, the strongest, shoved Hogni Karuson back, and leapt down into the snow. As he straightened himself, a heavy spear tore through his throat and nailed him to the wall. Next came Karuson, and fell over the dead man. He picked himself out of a drift and ran, but an arrow stopped him in mid-stride.

Frodi and Hogni of Hedemark got farther, and were almost into the darkness of the wood about the house, when from

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that wood dashed a band of armed men, with savage, exultant shouts. The brothers tried to dodge around the line, but were headed off, and threw themselves with desperate fury into the thick of their opponents, slashing madly with their swords. Frodi beat down two spearmen, and then fell with an ax through his brain. Hogni, less lucky, was grasped from behind by a gigantic Westfolder, lifted ignominiously from the ground, and made a prisoner.

So soon as Haki flung open the door, he knew that the most desperate moment of his life had come. His men, drawn up in a convex arc whose ends touched the corners of the hall, were fiercely pressed by line on line of mail-clad foes, whose weapons gleaming redly in the lurid firelight, rose and fell, thick as the surges of the sea.

His practised eye, running quickly over the struggling mass, estimated it as four times his own small force already, with fresh streams of spearmen running up from the wood. For a moment Gandalf and himself were safe behind the wall of their own men; but Haki knew that soon the pressure of their enemies would thrust them back against the burning house, and hold them there with sharp points until the flames should burn them up.

There was only one way of escape: straight through the hostile mass. Only a miracle could get them through it to the shelter of the forest, where the foe were thinner; but they must make it. Haki drew one arm about Gandalf, drew him to the hollow center of the line, and threw the full power of his lungs into a wild wolf-howl.

The cry, surging from his throat, rang loud above the clash of weapons, the cheers of the Westfold men, and the short, sharp shouts of the outlaws. Leaving Gandalf in the shelter of the line, Haki thrust himself into the space made for him by his fellows.

"Now, lads!" he roared. "The wedge! Form, at them, and break through!"

The berserks, veteran warriors, heaved, thrust, and forced out the hostile center a little; then reformed, still keeping their shield-rims locked together, into a wedge. Thrilling to their leader's ringing commands, they surged forward, were thrown back by the weight of numbers, surged again, and threw every ounce, in magnificent concert, against the wall of foes. Sword and ax fell with renewed fury.

Haki fought like a madman, and his men, howling like wolves, were swept into the berserk's frenzy, in which a man feels no pain, succumbs to no wounds, but knows his strength redoubled, and is driven by the beast-like lust to slay. The attackers reeled before that terrible madness, and slowly gave way. Gradually, the outlaws forged forward, over the bodies of their fallen fellows, over the thicker heaps of fallen Westfolders, over the trampled, bloody snow.

Hurling himself against the troop of Harald, Haki hewed down man after man. At last the pressure grew less; the berserks swept forward, and tore a ragged hole in the center of the mass before them. Howling, gnashing their teeth and foaming at the mouth, striking and tearing as beasts tear, they poured through the gap.

Haki, his left arm once more about Gandalf, his right dealing death-strokes, swung the king with him. Not a moment too soon, for the hostile archers had drawn off to the side, and poured in a ghastly rain of arrows upon them. Their shields were feathered thick, the berserks dropped to right and left, but still the bleeding remnant fought on, making for the wood.

NOW they were clear, and Haki thrust his king toward the wood. "Run!" he cried. "We will hold them here!"

Gandalf needed no urging, but fled staggering through the snow into the shelter of the forest.

The Westfolders had seen, and strove to pursue. But now the berserks were between them and the fugitive, and held them back desperately. Haki reformed his men swiftly, lengthening his line till the space between man and man was full four feet, lest the enemy should pour round the ends and overtake Gandalf. Step by step the outlaws retreated, their weapons swinging between the gaps in their ranks, and always taking two lives for one. Step by step the Westfolders pressed them, while the fugitive, engulfed now in the forest, made good his escape.

Not until the berserks themselves reached the edge of the wood did their enemies succeed in pouring round the little line. Then, as they fought for life, the array confronting them was burst open, and a mailed man, young and splendidly built,

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broke through the Westfold ranks. His eyes passed swiftly up and down the line of berserks, till they rested on Haki; then, with a roar of rage, he threw himself upon the outlaw chief.

At the first onset, his heavy sword split Haki's shield in two; and as the ruffian sought to disengage, the blade flashed again, and pierced the rings of his mail over the shoulder. Haki gritted his teeth and leaped in, his ax raining blows, but the other, nimble as himself, deftly avoided them.

At last the ax struck home, and the Westfolder's helmet fell from his head in two pieces, revealing a thick mass of yellow hair. And on the instant Haki recognized Harald the king. Once more he raised his ax, but the king, recovering from the blow, brought his red sword straight down upon the nose-piece of the berserk's helmet.

The curved steel plate gave way, and Haki staggered back, his nose cut through the bridge to the very level of his eyes. His face covered with blood, he felt rather than saw one of his men seize him round the body and drag him into the forest.

There, smarting with intolerable pain, he forced the agony back, and shouted to the fragments of his band to scatter. Like a covey of quail they took flight, and were lost among the thick of the trees.

"After them! Ten gold rings to the man who brings me the murderer's head!" Harald cried, and himself led the way into the wood.

It was of no avail. With the cunning of wild beasts, the outlaws had disappeared in the depths; and despite the persistence of the pursuers, not one of them was overtaken.

Harald, cursing furiously in his disappointment, was at last forced to give up the chase, and returned to the clearing.

Two men-at-arms came up from the rear, bearing a prisoner between them.

"Who is it?" Harald asked.

As he spoke, the burning hall fell in, with a stupendous, rending crash; and in the flare that followed, the king recognized Hogni.

"Hang him to the nearest tree!" he ordered.

And it was done.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROPHECY OF HORNKLOFI

"HE SHOULD be here by sunset."

"Aye, father. His messenger said that he would send his men to take over the lands of Hogni Karuson, and would come straight hither, with a small company."

"Are all things in order to receive him?"

"Nothing is wanting. The guest-house is swept, and strewn with fresh rushes; mattresses of swan's-down have been laid on the beds. Buri has brought two kegs of the best mead into the hall, and two calves and a sheep are being roasted. There is no lack of fire-wood, and baths are heating."

"You have done well, Gunnhild. But I wish you had not insisted on this jest, for I have seen too little of Harald to know how he will take it. Men say he is of a hasty temper."

"If Harald, Halfdan's son can not take a girl's jest, he has a poor spirit for a king. Fear nothing, father; when he learns the truth, he will forgive you readily for my sake."

Sigurd looked searchingly at the girl.

"Why should he forgive anything for you?" he questioned. "What are you to him? Though, indeed, I think he will hardly be ungrateful enough not to remember our service to him. And now I think of it, you are not so ill-looking as to fear any man's anger. Well, child, do not play with fire."

The girl's fine eyes flashed, and she answered enigmatically—

"It is a hot fire will burn me, though indeed, the hotter the flame, the more it pleases me." And with a light laugh and a curtsy, she ran into the house.

It was nearly sunset now; and Sigurd Stag, wrapped in his deerskin mantle, scanned the snowy surface across the lake for the first glimpse of his expected guests. The sky was filled with a pale, cold glow, and the trees that fringed the icy bank stood, motionless and sharp, against the bleak twilight. A round, frosty ball in the northwest, the sun glimmered wanly on the distant hills with the menace of coming snow. Sigurd shivered, and wrapped his cloak tighter about him.

At last his keen eyes made them out, a group of black spots on the snow. He turned about, threw the door open, and

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called to the servants to make ready the baths and put on a kettle of mead to warm. Then, summoning two of his warriors, who were in full mail, even to their helmets, and wore their best scarlet cloaks, he stationed them at the hall-entrance; and having taken his own furred scarlet dress of state, he hung the deerskin mantle on a peg behind the door. Yet, though armored, neither his men nor himself bore weapons, since that was not etiquette for the royal visit.

And now, when all was ready, and when the royal party reached the great door, Sigurd stepped forward, grasped the outstretched hand of the king, and bade him thrice welcome to Ringariki and his hall. Guthorm too he greeted, with dignified cordiality, and then gave his hand to the third and last of his noble guests. His men attended to the welcome of Harald's ten men-at-arms, and led them up the outside stairs to the loft.

Sigurd pressed the three noblemen to enter the hall, and there, all standing, they drank out the hot mead which a maid-servant brought them. This hospitable rite accomplished, he showed them out by a rear door into the guest-hall, a building of size equal to that of the hall of state, but divided off into two main portions, the men's sleeping-quarters, and the bower, where the women of the household had their rooms.

Each of these portions was subdivided by a corridor, from which individual chambers opened. In the men's quarters stood three great vats, each hollowed out of a single tree-trunk and filled with warm water for the baths. Here Sigurd left them, and went back to the hall of state to order the banquet on to the table.

When the guests rejoined him, they found the benches along the walls filled with the men of Sigurd and their own followers. At the southern end, on a raised dais opposite to and higher than his own, Sigurd had set up a second high-seat for a compliment to the king, an empty formality really, for its distance from the fire-pit and the tables made it an impracticable chair for the feast. For a moment, however, Harald seated himself there in deference to his host, then returned to the fire, where he stood warming his hands.

Now the tables were set; the smaller, on a low platform, waited for Sigurd, Gunnhild, and the distinguished guests; the longer and lower was prepared for their respective followers. At a gesture from Sigurd, all sat down, and old Buri and his helpers passed the smoking dishes and the cups of ale and mead. Gunnhild had not yet come, being busy in the kitchens. Her brother Gunnarr stood at the king's elbow, a great flagon in his hand.

Harald ate slowly and moodily. His mind still ran on the fight at Ringsakir, the outcome of which had not satisfied him. The others waited for him to speak. At last he roused himself, looked about the room, and pointed to the splendid collection of shields, mail armor, and weapons hanging about the walls, from which the flickering firelight struck weird flashes as it danced.

"I had not known, Sigurd," he began, "that your kingdom boasted of so many warriors. Here are weapons for several hundred. Where are the others, for I see a bare score here?"

"Forty more of them you can account for, my lord," the other answered. "And they are all. These swords and birnies are my share of the spoil won by my grandfather, Ragnarr Lodbrok. As you know, his last voyage was unsuccessful, for he died in an English dungeon. His men followed his sons on that memorable expedition of vengeance, and their children abide even now in Northumberland. Very few men follow my banner, but they are good fellows. Whenever you need us, you have but to ask."

Harald shook his head.

"You and they are needed at home," he said, "to protect your peasants against the berserks. You can serve me here better than in the field."

Once more the king relapsed into gloomy silence, and pushed his plate aside. He drank on, however, and seemed to grow more distraught with every cup. Guthorm turned his square, gray-haired soldier's face to Sigurd, and whispered that the escape of Gandalf and Haki had put the king out of sorts.

The third guest gazed constantly about the room, as if looking for something he had a right to expect, and saw not. He was a tall man of about six-and-twenty, with wide, high shoulders, arching chest, and a narrow waist. His face, distinguished by a high forehead and melancholy eyes, was

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that of a poet, an impression which was heightened by the thick black hair which flowed to his shoulders, where it was cut smoothly in the Irish fashion.

His skin also was darker than that of most Norsemen, and his long, mobile upper lip, with its upcurled mustache, was that of a Celt, as was his well-shaped nose. Poet he was, and half a Celt, for Thorbjorn Hornklofi, the king's skald, was the son of the Norwegian raider Thorgest by an Irish princess of Armagh.

Those melancholy eyes of his had seen his mother slain by her maddened countrymen, and had witnessed the drowning of his father's host in Lough Owel, after the tyrant Thorgest had made himself intolerable to his Celtic subjects. Other things had Hornklofi seen, for strange tales were told all over the North of his lonely wanderings in Ireland, shunned by the natives, and fabled to have been companioned by the fairy-folk.

However this might be, he possessed greater discernment than most men, and bore an uncanny reputation for seeing into the future. He was the first bard of the time, had brought with him strange, haunting melodies and intricate measures from over-seas, and surpassed all other skalds in power of poetic invention.

Still his eyes roamed about, as if searching, and ever and again they would turn to Sigurd as if asking a question; yet no word crossed his lips.

AT LAST, as the silence was becoming awkward, there came from the passageway the slow step of Gunnhild. The sound of her feet reached the poet's ears first, and his face assumed a quizzical look, as having found that for which he sought, yet not knowing what to make of it. And now she entered, just as a burning log, breaking in the middle, threw up a spurt of light that cast her face into clear relief.

Hornklofi sat gazing at her, while the melancholy deepened, clouded all his features, then, receding, broke, and gave way to a smile of rare beauty. Gunnhild saw, and could not help smiling back, for the bard's face had an unearthly fairness in it that somehow called faint fragments of old legends to her mind.

But now Harald saw, too, and the effect of the girl's beauty on him was widely different. He leaned forward, placing both elbows on the table that he might look the more nearly. His face, at first frozen with sheer wonder at her loveliness, melted as she came forward into the light of the torches, and grew bright and radiant. All the moodiness, all the restraint, was gone, scattered, as the mists are scattered by the bright morning sun. Indeed, the effect of her upon him, then and always, was like the clearing of mists from his soul.

She stopped by her foster-father's seat at the head of the table. Sigurd rose, presented her first to the king and then to the others, then bade her be seated in the vacant place on Harald's left. This brought her opposite to Hornklofi, who sat to the right of Guthorm.

Harald, whose eyes had never left her since he first saw her face in the flare of the broken log, turned as she passed behind him, following her with his gaze. Smiling, Gunnhild withdrew her own. This brought her face to face with the bard, who, accepting her smile as if it had been for him alone, looked at her speculatively with those dark Celtic eyes of his. At length the eyes began to smolder, and across the face of Hornklofi little flashes of fire and flecks of shadow played as flame and shadow flickered in the room.

Still seeing only Gunnhild, Harald busied himself in waiting on her, taking the plate from the hands of the astonished Buri, filling her cup from the flagon Gunnarr handed him, but saying never a word. Desiring to break the tenseness of the situation, which embarrassed her sorely, Gunnhild did what no man there had courage to do, and asked about the recent battle—

"Having so valiantly overthrown the rebels against his crown, and inflicted well-earned punishment, I trust King Harald will remain here with us for some time in the peace and contentment he has won?"

Harald frowned slightly, but instead of growing really angered, found himself speaking more readily on this dangerous subject than he had anticipated.

"I shall not stay as long as I could wish," he answered, "for my work is not yet done. Two of the traitors escaped, and I can not rest till they are hanged. Yet I wish they would hang themselves, for I can think of nothing pleasanter than a Winter here.

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You and your daughter must come with us to Tunsberg, Sigurd. Such a maid was never born to spend her days in the wilderness, with none to pay homage to her but your house-carles."

Gunnhild cast at her father a look that troubled him. He knew his foster-daughter's high spirit, and feared she might say something which would breed strife. Indeed, he was not far wrong.

"I wonder," she mused, half to herself, but still turned toward the king, "whether I should find in Harald's royal hall any who would offer fiercer homage than I have already received."

Harald's brow contracted, and he looked at her frowningly.

"Who is this bold admirer?" he queried.

"None other," she replied, fixing her proud eyes on his, "than your enemy, my lord, the traitor Haki. He offered me marriage. Sigurd can tell you what answer I gave him. Then he threatened to return some day and take me by force."

Harald leaped to his feet, his cheeks flushed with anger; but quickly remembering himself, sat down again, and said, with as calm a tone as he could assume—

"For that piece of insolence, he shall be flayed alive, instead of hanged."

TO BE CONTINUED

SHIF'LESS

by W. J. ROE

FOLKS sez I'm shif'less,
A no-'count, lazy, dreamin' guy,
Wastin' my time while th' days slip by,
Fishin' an' huntin' f'um sun-up t' night—
An' I guess they're right!

Jes' nach'ully shif'less—
'Case I doze in th' shade o' some fren'ly tree
While th' breezes whisper strange things t' me,
Tales o' th' fiel's, an' th' woods, an' th' sea;
Er I watch some crow in his heavy flight,
A dwindlin' speck till he fades f'um sight—
An' I guess theyre right!

Jes' nach'ully shif'less—
'Case I ha'nt th' pools where th' big fish lie,
An' dream while th' crick goes chucklin' by,
A-laughin' up t' th' sunny sky;
Jes' dream o' climbin' some giddy height
By ack'chally doin' th' things I might!
But I guess they're right!

Jes' nach'ully shif'less—
'Case I tramp th' woods with a dawg an' gun,
'Case I know th' leads where th' wild things run,
'Case I love th' big trees—ev'ry one—
An' I dream o' th' harnessed timber's might,
O' derricks that make man's labor light—
An' I guess they're right!

Folks sez I'm shif'less,
A no-'count, lazy, dreamin' guy,
Wastin' my time while th' days slip by,
Fishin' an' huntin' f'um sun-up t' night—
An' I guess they're right!

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Percival

by

Hugh S. Miller

Author of "The Tent in the Mallee," and "The Eye of the Hawk."

THE conversation had been of the sea and the brave men who sail it, of their adventures and hardships, and particularly of their character.

Williams had given evidence of an inclination to talk on the subject. As a preliminary he crossed his legs for greater comfort and the bench creaked protestingly under the transplantation of his weight. It had a right to creak, for Williams is so well put up one suspects him of having steel beams and pillars for bones, and cement instead of meat in the interstices.

"Time was," he said reflectively, "when I had a hankering to go to sea. And when the chance came, I took it. I sailed with two of the hardest-fisted sailormen that ever broke a skull; I saw so much character of one kind or another I got goggle-eyed looking at it; and I had all the adventure I'm capable of accommodating."

And then he told of Percival the Terrible and Black Bill, the light that failed, and the wreck of the *Hesperus*.

THAT lop-sided vessel out there in the stream, threatening to lay over on her side and take a nap, reminds me of the *Hesperus* except that she's better looking, being thinner at the ends than in the middle and having enough paint left to show she was intended to be black. The *Hesperus* had no more figure than a freight car. You got the idea that the builders had simply sawed her off the right length and hammered the ends shut. She was as free of paint as a girl of six, and where the sea had scarred her, she was blotchy like a pinto pony.

The circumstances that brought us together began with a sharp attack of intoxication on my part, in the course of which I took a New Haven train instead of a subway express at the Grand Central station and was disembarked at Providence by numerous brakemen. I gathered from the testimony later that I proceeded up town and picked an argument with a roomful of citizens, and in due time engaged several in combat. Unfortunately for justice, the copper who came in to referee was prejudiced in favor of the native sons and saluted me with a nightstick when I wasn't looking, and for the next forty-eight hours I was a house guest of the city authorities.

I didn't need a night letter to tell me I had no job left in New York and there was no reason for perturbing myself about getting back in a hurry—especially as I was minus the price of a ticket. So I decided to hunt a job right there. And that's how I happened to go to sea.

I was wandering along the water-front, just having missed connections as a watchman in a warehouse, when a chap hails me.

"Hey, there!" he says.

"Hey, yourself!" said I.

"Want a job?" says he.

"I do," said I.

"Can you shovel coal?" says he.

"Me?" I said. "I've got the Nobel prize for coal-shoveling."

Then he proposes I ship on the *Hesperus*

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as a stoker, and starts to make a speech about how fine is a life at sea, but I told him he didn't have to exert himself, as I was convinced a sea trip was just about what I had need of.

"She's no yacht," he says, on the way, "and then again she ain't the worst old hooker in the world. You'll see."

I might have known there was something wrong, the way he said, "you'll see," but I was so occupied I wasn't looking for hunches. And of course when I did get a look at her that night I didn't see anything out of the way. All I could make out in the dark were two sticks and a smoke-stack. And never having been on a ship before, the inside of her was strange to me, and interesting, even if the air was a bit sour.

"When do we sail," I inquired, "and where do we go?"

"Tomorrow morning," he says, "for Newport News."

"For a cargo of coal," he adds, "for Havana."

"Good night," I says. "Do I have to shovel the whole cargo?"

"No," he says, "they have machinery for that." And then he goes on, a bit mysterious—

"If you're the kind that'll take a hint, maybe I could give you one."

"Disseminate it," I said. "I'm listening."

"The captain," he remarks, "is no man to get gay with. Whatever you do, don't run foul of Black Bill. If you was an old man on this coast—" he says, with a look—"you wouldn't need to be told. Most every seafaring man from Key West to Portland, Maine, has been beaten up some time or other by Black Bill."

"He must do things in a large way," I says. "It's a cheerful welcome for a new hand."

"Maybe I made a mistake telling you," he says.

"Not especially," I says. "I don't figure on backing out. And besides,"—I says, with a careless stretch—"if it comes to the worst, I'm no Shetland pony myself."

He agrees to that. "But," he says, "you're not as big as him. And he sure is full of steam."

This sort of talk impressed me, so I asked him to tell me more about Black Bill. And he says there isn't much to tell except he's an ignorant brute who knows only one thing, which is how to get work out of the laziest crew that ever shipped. He can trim any two men, and everybody's afraid of him. He never had a friend in his life, never said a kind word, and never had been known to smile.

When it came to navigation, he knew enough to pull the *Hesperus* out of one port and stick her in another up and down the Atlantic coast if everything went all right, but that's where he stopped. If he happened to get turned around in the dark, he was lost. Then he'd have to rely on the mate, and if there was anything in the world he didn't care about, it was this. Rather than do it, he'd take some awful chances, and as he owned the ship, every plate and bolt in her, he didn't have to account to any one but himself. He hated to admit that a mate knew more than he did, and he'd put up an enormous bluff. But he didn't fool a solitary human being. Only it was tempting fate to act as if you didn't take everything he said as gospel and everything he did as perfect.

"Just remember this," says my friend, as we're about to step aboard, "Black Bill won't stand no opposition. If he even thinks you're disagreeing with him in your mind, he ain't satisfied until he clouts it out of you. If you want to get along with him, agree with him—that's all."

"Where," I inquired, "is this primeval person?"

"There," he says, pointing at a little round glass which the light was coming through, and I peeked in.

Before me was Black Bill. The first thing I thought of was one of those gorillas that can drink out of bottles and sit up at table—only this one was bigger and had a beard, which the others don't seem to fancy. He was standing in the middle of the room with his hands—or front feet, whichever you've a mind to call them—behind his back, making an effort to think, judging by the expression on his face. I looked him over pretty carefully.

Maybe the thick glass in the window magnified him, or I was overcome with stage-fright, but certainly he did shape up about twice the size of any one I'd ever seen. I remember wondering how he got into the room and how he'd get out, the door being the regulation width and height. I was real surprised, when he came out a minute later, to see him do it merely by bending over and turning sideways.

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"Who's that with you, Ellis?" he says to my friend.

"A new hand for the fire-room, sir," says Ellis.

"Ha!" says Black Bill. "That's good." He took a look my way and said:

"He'll find everything. pleasant on board here won't he, Ellis?"

"Aye, sir," says Ellis.

After the captain left, I turned to Ellis.

"He don't seem so bad," I said.

"Wait," says he, gloomily, "until we're about five miles offshore."

"Why then?" I asked him.

"Because," he answers, "at that distance it's inconvenient to leave the ship, even if one has a mind to."

WELL, the next morning we were off. I say it flippantly, but I hadn't ought to. There's a lot of meaning in those words "we were off," when they're referring to a man's first time off to sea. I was down-stairs tossing nuggets of coal into the furnace when we started, and didn't see much of the getaway, but the shaking of the engines and the quivering of the ship as she moved gave me such a thrill I burst out singing, and I don't often do that. Pretty soon I noticed the fires were swaying this way and that, and half the time I was missing the mark and dropping the coal all over the place. And then the floor began to rock; and next it gave a heave that pasted me against a hot fire-box, at which I sat down and sorrowed loudly.

But the worst was yet to come, and if you've ever been to sea I don't need to tell you what it was. I crawled off to one side and lay down to die, but they wouldn't leave me alone long enough. First the second engineer came and bothered me to get up and go to work, and I told him to chase himself; then the chief engineer appears and threatens me with mutiny or something if I don't get up, and I told him to drown himself, and next—a few minutes later—I opened my eyes and looked up into the beard and face of Black Bill. He was gazing down at me in a calculating way that didn't strike me as being overly sympathetic. Right then the thought came to me that we must be about five miles offshore and I suffered one intensely pessimistic moment.

Usually when a man's intending to start anything he makes a few remarks about your appearance or your ancestors, or something, by way of working up emotion, but not so with Black Bill. He operated different from anybody I'd ever seen. He just reached over silent with one hand and elevated me enough to intercept a swing he was negotiating with the other—which I did with great success, skating gracefully on my starboard ear along the iron floor and coming to rest at the foot of the ladder which led up-stairs.

Needless to say, I ascended the ladder. I might have stayed and taken him on for a few slams, but it occurred to me that fate must have had a purpose in putting that ladder so close to hand, and I'd be showing a lack of appreciation if I didn't take advantage of it; so away I went hastily, doing pretty well considering that I'd just been on the edge of dying. I popped up on deck like a cork out of a catsup bottle, intending to keep on going aloft until I could jump off on a cloud, but one look was all I needed.

The tops of those masts were drawing big circles on the sky, and that didn't appeal to me. And that wasn't all. There was a dry hard snow riding a lively wind down from the north, dusting up the decks with talcum powder, and the sea was chopped up into little gray hills with white tops skittering along and busting every now and then with a blow-up of spray; and no sun, so everything looked unhappy.

And there was I in sport clothes—consisting of a favorite undershirt and working pants, still a bit moist with good honest sweat—which is no costume for the deck in Winter. And *that* wasn't all. As soon as I stopped I began to feel that same feeling coming over me again—and to hang on the rail in an undershirt, with a Winter wind fanning you and packing the snow neat and tidy around the various edges, the while your diaphragm is practising starts and stops, is no form of amusement.

By and by I caught a rear view of Old Whiskers proceeding along the deck forward, so I slunk inside and headed down-stairs again, and being a bit hasty and the hand-rail and iron steps being slick and oily, made the whole trip on express schedule with short stops at the landings only. The last drop, I remember, was about twelve feet with no curves to slow me up.

That wind from the north chased all the way to Newport News. The second day out, along in the afternoon, I went up to look around. The *Hesperus* then was rising

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and falling and staggering like a drunken giraffe. First she'd get down on her forefeet and kick out behind, and next she'd decide to sit back and skid. Every once in a while a long, ugly wave, stepping it off in the direction of the equator, would come up from behind as if he didn't see us, and foam all over the deck.

I had thought that as soon as we made port I'd clear out, but when the time came I found I wasn't so keen about quitting. The rocking of the boat didn't upset me any more, and I guessed I wouldn't see much of Black Bill down where I was working if I attended to my job.. And then Ellis, he told me that the farther south we went the finer the weather would be, and soon we'd be in the tropics watching flying fishes and orange-colored moons rising out of lemon-colored seas, and all that sort of thing. So the end of it was, I said I'd stay and see it through.

It was then I went ashore and turned around and got a good look at the *Hesperus*, and came near changing my mind again. If ever there was a poor, blind old ship waiting for a vacancy in the boneyard, it was this wash-boiler that I'd just stepped off. I didn't know much about ships, but when I got her in a good light and then took a squint at some of the others lying in the harbor, I knew there was something wrong somewhere. She looked as if she might have been left out in the rain for ten or fifteen years, long enough to accumulate a quadruple plating of rust; and every time she'd move with the shifting of the tide or the wash from some other boat her bow'd go one way and her stern the other.

Ellis and I went for a stroll, looking into several places where sea-going men gather. He had a lot of friends, Ellis did. Finally we picked up a couple of them off a big coal schooner, and they took us down a side street to a new place where you'll find more officers than seamen or stokers, and it was here we happened to be present when the big show was pulled off which upset all calculations and brought Percival McSween into the plot.

We were sitting around a table at the end of the bar when we heard a loud-voiced party say:

"Afraid o' him? Afraid o' that——" And so on. It was a heavy-set individual leaning against the bar buying drinks for a gang of six and consequently getting their best attention while he was telling what a man he was.

Ellis looks around and gives a funny start, and says:

"Jiminetti! That's Friedlander."

"That so?" I says. "Who's he?"

"Why the mate of the *Hesperus*," he replies.

I'd never seen the mate, so I scan him closely, and then I caught the drift of his remarks. He was telling the bunch he wasn't scared of Black Bill; that the Old Man knew enough to leave him alone, that if Black Bill ever did get heavy with him he thought, by —— he could take care of himself, that it was about time some one took a fall out of the skipper of the *Hesperus*—and a whole lot more along the same line.

Naturally, that kind of thing interested us, so we pricked up our ears. We weren't the only ones, either, because every one in the room knew about Black Bill, and pretty soon all the conversation died out while they listened to Friedlander. And he didn't mind it at all. He just threw his head back and delivered a great little oration on the difference between a roughneck—meaning the Old Man, and a gentleman—meaning himself. I didn't know many things about his personal accomplishments in the line of slaughter, but I sure did think he was either the craziest hero or the bravest idiot in the world.

And then Ellis and I and the rest of us that were looking that way, we got a shock. Black Bill pushed through the swinging doors and stepped inside.

The first thing he heard, of course, was his own name, so he halted. I remember that the doors hit him a rap in the back and stopped with a shiver. It took just about the tenth part of a second for the whole room—all except Friedlander—to discover we had him with us, and then everybody tried to outdo the others keeping quiet. The result was that a sick and creepy silence, such as you'd expect to find in a lonely tomb, settled over the proceedings.

And Friedlander's voice sounded louder than ever. It shattered that silence like a yap dog's bark in the reading-room of the Central Library. Finally one of his pals got up go enough to nudge him and crook a thumb over his shoulder toward the door. Friedlander looked up and saw Black Bill. Right then the silence became complete and clammy.

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There was something about the way Black Bill started across the floor that made me think of a wild lion about to eat a native child, or a gas-works getting ready to explode. There was the same sort of unsentimental deadliness about it. He stopped in front of the mate and looked at him. The mate began to move back gradually—fading away as it were.

Black Bill aimed his right for the side of the mate's head. The mate saw it coming. He had plenty of time to put up his guard, and did. But that knob of knuckles on the end of Black Bill's wrist just pushed his arms out of the way as if they'd been macaroni and arrived at its destination as fresh as when it started. The mate left the floor, floated a bit, then turned over gracefully and came down on the top of his head like a fish leaping out of water.

Black Bill, with his hands on his hips, waited for him to sit up. When he did, he reached over and caught him with one hand by the collar and with the other by the pants, established the whereabouts of the door by glancing sideways, then gave him a heave. The mate sailed through the air, hit the swinging doors with a crack, and passed on in the general direction of North Carolina.

And then Black Bill turned to the bartender.

"Jimmie," he says, "if you happen to hear of a good mate looking for a job, send him around, will you?"

And the bartender tells him he would.

IT DON'T take them long to load up after they get started, and in a few days we were ready to sail again. Then we had to lay around another day to get a mate. You see, they all knew the *Hesperus* and Black Bill and weren't impatient for the job.

The one we took on, so Ellis told me, had come round from the Pacific coast on a freighter that had been sold to a firm of Britishers, and instead of going back West right away, he had decided to take a turn or two on the Atlantic.

He had only got in the day before and wasn't acquainted, so he didn't know about Black Bill. And then Ellis sprung the big surprise.

"His name," he says, "is Percival. Think of that!"

"Percival!" I yelled, horrified. "It can't be true."

"It's true enough," says Ellis. " 'Percival McSween, Seward, Alaska', is the way it's on the articles. Think what a ——"

Just then I overheard the second telling the third what he'd found out about the new mate from one of the engineers of the freighter he'd come round on, and signaled Ellis to be quiet a minute.

"He's a college boy," says the second. "His father sent him to a university out West, but before he got through he skipped off and went to sea. I suppose he had been reading romantic stories, and they turned his head."

"The Old Man will bully the life out of him," says the third.

"They nicknamed him 'Percival the Terrible'," says the second, moving on. "A good joke, most likely."

And then Ellis comes in with—

"Think what a sweet time Black Bill's goin' to have initiatin' Percy into his 'Eat-a-Dirt-or-Die' fraternity!"

But when I got a look at Percival—well, I didn't know, I didn't know. To begin with, I felt another of my pessimistic moments coming on, and that always means there's something in the air besides dust. And then the more I looked at Percival, the more it struck me he didn't fit in with my idea of a college boy. He was like no college boy I'd ever seen—and it wasn't only because he didn't have a book under his arm and a curved pipe in his mouth.

"No," I says to myself, "if you're the kind of college boy they have out there, brother, it must be *some* college. I don't know much about higher education, but I'd come a whole lot closer picking you for the dreadnaught champion of the Arctic Circle than for a topheavy Doctor of Letters."

He was shorter than Black Bill by about the thickness of two safety-razor blades, and he was flatter in front, which made him about fifteen or twenty pounds lighter than the Old Man, but his neck stood up thick and straight like the trunk of one of those ironwood trees in Bronx Park; and he had a big chest and long brawny arms that looked as though they might have spent a few odd moments swinging a pick in those Alaskan gold-fields or pulling up the North Pole by the roots and moving it from place to place. And when I saw his college-boy

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lips open and heard him say, gently but sincerely, to one of my colleagues:

"Shake a leg there, you pasty-faced mongrel!" I got a flash that we'd been joined by a juvenile that was likely to prove a source of entertainment.

Black Bill was never a man to put off a thing if there was to be any fun in it for himself, so about an hour after we'd left Newport News, and were slopping around Cape Henry, he thought he'd proceed to set Percival right about how matters were run on the *Hesperus*.

The second mate was on the bridge and Percival was on the fore-deck watching the men cover the hatch and singing to himself about a man who jumped into a bramble bush and scratched out both his eyes, "by the li-ight, by the li-ight, o-of thuh mo-oon," when Black Bill ambles toward him with a hungry expression. There were a few short remarks passed between them which we didn't hear, and then Percival says, in a voice that's full of spirit:

"Who in Sam Hill are you talking to, you pachydermatous oaf?"

Black Bill didn't know what a pachydermatous oaf was, any more'n the rest of us, but he surmised it wasn't complimentary, and without another word he starts one for Mr. Percival McSween's countenance. It was the same kind he'd worked on me and on Friedlander—a twenty-horse-power clip; but the trouble with this one was it didn't land. Our college friend ducks and then retorts with a hook into Black Bill's front yard that would have punctured a sand barge but only made the Old Man grunt.

"You would?" he says, real surprised, "I'll show you, you cub!"

And Percival, he grins and says:

"I'm waiting to be shown." And in about fourteen seconds they were at it.

I have seen numerous little affairs of honor in the flesh, and moving-pictures of all important prize-fights since Julius Cæsar's time, but none of them compared with this one. There was something about it that made me think of a couple of prehistoric animals settling up accounts. There was no fancy sparring or shifting around for position; and no maneuvering for advantages such as getting the sun in the other man's eyes—I forgot to say there was no sun that day or for a week afterward—but 'twas just stand up and slug, slug all over the deck.

First the college-boy mate would plant one on the skipper's shirt button with a thud like a railroad collision; and then the Old Man in return would caress him alongside the jaw with a compressed typhoon that would plaster him against a deck-house and start a few rivets, at which the lad from the Golden West would grin again and toss a half a ton of bone and marrow into Black Bill's eye; and Old Whiskers would endeavor to end the entire incident by patting the youngster in the cupboard with a regular stone-crusher.

Black Bill was about fifteen years older, a bit heavier, and much fiercer in disposition, but Percival made up for this by being a trifle quicker. I should say their hitting capacity, length of stroke, and working pressure were about the same. It was plain the Old Man, although he was thoroughly enjoying the fight, couldn't get over the nerve of the mate thinking he stood a ghost of a chance, and consequently was inclined to be peevish; while Percival, keeping that soft smile all the time, went about his work quiet and contented-like.

I had to admire the way he traveled—easy and smooth, as though all his bearings were packed in good fresh grease and all his rods running true. The longer it lasted, and the more the skipper realized the new mate was able to hold him, the more the Old Man determined to subdue him if it took a year. You could see it sticking out all over him. His reputation was at stake, and he knew it. And then it was a kind of case of national pride—East against the West and that sort of thing.

We left Newport News about 3 P. M., and the fight started about four. At five o'clock it was dark, the lights were on, there was no sign of peace, and the second mate on the bridge was getting sore about having to run the ship all by himself. The sea was rougher, too, and jostling the *Hesperus* most carelessly.

Once in a while a lift from Black Bill would prod Percival into the gleam from a port-hole, or a thump from Percival would jounce Black Bill past a doorway, or the ship would hit a rut and send them both sky-hootin' through the light, but most of the time they were just shadowy panting magnitudes, silent except for frequent rib-starting bumps and occasional confidential curses.

In the glimpses we got we noted that both the belligerents were damaged. Black Bill

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had a royal purple eye which was fast closing, and a rip along the cheek, while Percival had a red hole in his chin and was short a piece of his left ear; and both of them were favoring various spots on their corporosities where they had come in contact.

BY SIX o'clock we were beginning to think we ought to make some kind of a try at separating them. There wasn't a one of us that didn't appreciate a good fight, but two hours of steady going without any time out struck us as being too much of a good thing. The cook, a spluttery little Englishman, had their supper all ready to put on the table, and he was complaining most pestiferously because he had to keep it hot.

Not being much afraid of anything—and knowing, anyway, that they couldn't hear—he was standing in the door of the kitchen, asking them what they thought *he* was; and who they thought *they* were, that they could keep him waiting as long as they liked; and a cook's life was dog's life enough without having to put up with their funny tricks; and he hoped, s'help 'im, they'd jolly well bash their blessed 'eads off; and the ship was going to sink, judging by the look of the weather, and it wouldn't make a bit of difference if they did kill themselves—and so on, until we got tired hearing him, and asked him why he didn't go make them stop if he really wanted them to eat, and also told him that from what we knew of his cooking it'd be doing the two of them a good turn if we'd leave them be and let them finish each other.

And then by this time the second mate, who couldn't see the fight from where he was, was making himself so objectionable with orders that none of us, sailors or stokers, could get a decent look at it. He had a right to be grouchy, though, and not alone because he was missing the scrap; the sea was good and rough and he needed all the help he could get.

By and by he catches sight of me and waves to me to come up.

"You're the biggest man in the crew," he says, having to yell on account of the wind.

I said I wasn't big enough to ring the bell on those two down-stairs, if that was what he meant.

"That's exactly what I mean," he says, as if there were no two ways about it. "I want you to step in between 'em, hold 'em apart a second, and tell 'em there's a terrible gale comin' up, and for Heaven's sake to lay off a while; that if they don't, there's no knowin' what'll happen to the ship."

There was just enough light from the wheel-house for me to see his face, so I looked him right between the eyes firmly but respectfully, as becomes a man talking to an officer, meanwhile putting into my voice everything I had in the way of earnestness and sincerity.

"It's true I'm the biggest man in the crew," I says, "and I've only been aboard a few days, but I'm willing to bet a dollar and a quarter," I says, "that the skipper of this craft has already knocked me twice as far as any man half my size who has been on here twice as long. Sir," I adds, "I wouldn't interject my personality between those two Goliaths if I knew I'd be hung to the yardarm at daybreak for refusing."

This sort of put a quietus on him. We just stood there, holding to the rail in the wind, him trying to make up his mind what to do, and me thinking up arguments to excuse myself from being the victim. We were still standing there when all of a sudden the cook bursts on us out of the dark, all full of excitement.

"They're in the starboard alleyway now, sir," he says to the second mate. "There's light in there so's they can see each other, and they'll be good for all night," he says, "and here it is seven o'clock and I've got supper still waitin' for them. I tell you, sir," he goes on, "I wouldn't have come out on this bloomin' old tub——"

But the second mate shuts him up short and sharp, having more on his mind than whether the supper was kept hot or not. And then the spunky little devil of a cook came across with a few remarks that he thought he could attract their attention and maybe give them a message if he had some of the crew to stand behind him. The second mate tells him to go as far as he likes as quick as he can, and asks me a bit sarcastically if I would mind being one of the party.

"No, sir," I says, "I'll stand behind him, gladly. All I want is a hefty spanner or a slice bar, and I'll stand behind him as long as he'll let me."

We went down-stairs and got together most of the crew, each man arming himself with whatever he could find. For myself,

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having several times had service out of a heavy wrench, I slipped down to the engine-room and grabbed one. The cook meanwhile had accumulated a butcher-knife and a gun. The gun was a big fellow shooting an extra long cartridge and carrying a charge that I suppose would throw a bullet from here to Sandy Hook. When everything was ready he led us into the port alleyway, then across one of the gratingsa bove the engine-room and out into the starboard alleyway, in which Black Bill and the mate were rampaging.

It was a dirty narrow passage with iron floor, walls and roof, lighted by a couple of little yellow globes. Under one of these were the skipper and mate still at it hammer and tongs but somewhat more deliberate than they were at first. At one end, the alleyway was closed by an iron door, and at the other by us—fingering our various implements restlessly. In front of us, wearing an old white apron and peaked cap, stood the cook, toying with the butcher-knife and gun.

We watched the two of them lunging at each other and being flapped from side to side against the iron walls as the ship went through her exercises, and listened to their heavy breathing. As soon as they were settled in a clinch, which gave them a rest, the cook spoke.

"Beg pardon, sir!" And again, louder. "Beg pardon, sir!"

But the Old Man paid no more attention than if he'd been in Europe. Then the cook let out a yell—"Captain!"

But without even giving him a chance to say more, Black Bill throws Percival off and they're at it again.

So what does Cookie do but elevate the gun—it was loaded with blanks—direct the nozzle down to one side, and pull. Noise? The commotion that field-piece made in that tin tunnel would have drowned out a "busy Bertha" with a megaphone. It was so loud the skipper and mate didn't know at first what direction it was coming from, and they just stopped dead as if they were frozen. Then they caught sight of us, and both of them leered as though they were annoyed about something. The cook, he gripped the butcher-knife a little tighter, took a breath, and addressed them.

"Gents," he says, "the ship is sinkin', all the boats is smashed and done for, the second mate's gone mad on the bridge, all the engineers is dead, the bosun and four men are down with the cholera, and—" as he paused, Black Bill jumps for the door we came through, and Percival hits for the one at the other end of the alleyway—"and"—says the cook louder—"supper's *ready!*"

With that he moves us all forward so we get between Black Bill and Percival; and when they turn around as if they were going for each other again, here was a whole fleet of us choking up the alleyway. The cook and a bunch make a fuss over the skipper, telling him he ought to eat, and I do the same with the mate. He was a cool one, that Percival.

"Very well," he says to me, friendly as could be. "If Cyclops feels like refreshment, I'll take some, too."

Well, the end of it was that we got them separated and washed and fed up. By that time it was the second mate's watch again, and the skipper goes up on the bridge with him. Percival, not being due on the bridge until midnight, takes a sleep. Nothing else happened during the night, except the weather, but that was plenty. It was the kind you sit at home and read of in yarns about the sea, and wonder how the poor sailors lived through it if it was as bad as it sounds in the telling.

ALL the time we were drawing nearer Hatteras, and early the next morning we were close enough to get the full weight of the gale almost square in the beezer. Shades of dawn, how that ship did perform! Down where I was sprinkling coal everywhere except where I wanted to, the iron side of that old ship would bend in and spring back like a dent in a derby hat, only with a lot more noise.

I never saw anything made of iron that was quite so wiggly and elastic. It made me think—if you could speak of a ship doing such a thing, I'd say it was like she was trying to learn one of those Hawaiian grass-skirt dances and was a bit awkward at it. First second I'd be thrown lengthwise against a bulkhead and get a bruise; second second I'd be gummed against a boiler and get a burn, and then I'd fetch up under a ventilator and get a tub of ice-cold water down my neck right fresh out of the ocean.

Besides all this, one of the engineers was hovering around yelling for more steam and threatening to shoot us if we didn't keep moving. A couple of times he banged away

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into a heap of coal to show us he was still there and meant business. Naturally we were jumpy, and to have that cannon go off nigh drove us into hysterics. It wasn't surprising that we all had crazy notions. I remember I thought of myself as shut up in a bucket tied to the end of a long rope, with one fellow cracking the bucket with a ball-bat and another shooting at it as it sailed through the air.

When I finally got up where I could see what was going on outside, I near shivered myself into a knot. Being down-stairs was bad, but to be up-stairs where I could see it was worse. Everything was black and wet and moving, with whole ranges of Berkshires and Catskills and Alleghanies bobbing up, racing like mad for a while, and then suddenly melting away while others came and took their places. In the middle of them all was the poor little *Hesperus* doing her best to dodge them and not getting on very well at it.

A big heap of water about the size and shape of Mount Ararat would jump up underneath her and she'd go sliding down the side of it helter-skelter, rolling and swinging as if she was reaching out for something to catch hold of; or Pike's Peak, topped with white, being on one side of her, would decide to go call on Mount McKinley on the other side, and paying no attention to traffic regulations would pour himself right over her, snow-cap and all. Every time this happened we absented ourselves from the scenery for a few minutes, leaving only our masts and funnel sticking above the water, like periscopes.

And then the ship, needing air, would start climbing frantically, shoving up her wood and iron contrivances, ventilators and rails, and finally her fo'c'sle head, streaming wet, with a gasp like the sigh a sea-lion gives when he comes up. And when none of this was going on, those overgrown waves would do with her just what the trained seals on the stage do with a ball, butt her from one to another, balance her a second, and then pass her on—all of which is no way to treat a ship that's so near all in, her keel doesn't track.

You'd have thought that under the circumstances, with need for everybody to be helping hold her together, Black Bill would have laid aside his animosity and buckled down to running the ship. We thought so—but we were wrong. Black Bill's was a durable rage, and he was booked for a long stand. The more he contemplated that under his nose was a young dub that not only disagreed with him in thought, but actually had the nerve to say so and oppose him forcibly with sundry swift and painful pokes, the madder he got.

The question of keeping the ship afloat wasn't half as important to him as subduing this college youth that didn't want to be subdued. First thing we knew, he found the mate down in the stokehole where he'd come to talk to the chief engineer about steam and so forth, and made as if he was going to print one on him. With that, Percival grabs a long heavy coal shovel.

"Keep away from me," he says, "or I'll wrap this sugar spoon around your neck. I'll attend to you when I get through with this gentleman."

"Ah-rrrrrh!" says the captain through his beard, but all the same he pauses.

Percival finishes his conversation with the chief engineer and thanks him, and then turns to Black Bill.

"Now," he says, "come on—you cod-fish!" Right away they were off again.

We were working double shift in the stokehole just then, and I was present and voting all through the engagement. I don't mind saying, either, I was voting for the college youth whose papa had sent him out into the world to get an education. I hadn't quite forgotten that evil lick Black Bill had given me, and I wouldn't have wept if the scowl had been knocked clear off his ugly face.

We had thought, the night before, we were inconvenienced in the practise of our chosen profession by merely having the ship agitating itself under us, and the second engineer itching for a chance to tattoo us with his automatic, but now, in addition, we had two behemoths bouncing around, swinging arms hard as engine-cranks and distributing fourteen-inch blows that didn't care much where they landed. Many times the ship would catch them off their guard and flip them from end to end of the establishment, bowling us over one by one like so many bottles.

There's no sport in having four hundred and fifty pounds or more of fury hit you in the back when you're balancing on tiptoes, with your mind on putting a shovelful of coal where custom says it ought to be put. Every once in a while, when he saw what was coming, the second engineer would yell

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"low bridge!" And those of us that were spry enough would jump aside and watch them go down the aisle like a couple of runaway locomotives, to bring up against a bulkhead with a jolt that must have bumped the breath right out of the old *Hesperus.*

It seemed like they were battering each other down there in the stokehole for a couple of weeks, but it was really only a couple of hours. Then they moved up to where the air was fresher. They were pretty groggy by that time, and when word came down they'd fallen into their bunks for a nap, we thought maybe they'd decided to call it off. But not so; at least not so far as Black Bill was concerned. His head had been jarred so much he couldn't sleep, and I guess it riled him to note that Percival was slumbering as sweetly as an innocent child. He started for that sleeping mate with a piece of pipe, and if the cook hadn't seen him and let out a whoop, there'd have been one less for him to cook for.

It was at this point we realized that so long as Black Bill had strength enough to wave his little finger he was going to keep Mr. Percival McSween occupied, and we could expect no help from either skipper or mate until one or the other gave up—which didn't seem to be promised soon enough to be interesting. So it was up to Mr. Second Mate, with the bosun relieving him so he could get some sleep, to run the ship.

Then there was one other thing to fix. The little adventure of the Old Man and the piece of pipe showed us that Percival was liable to be finished off from behind or in his sleep—Black Bill being in such a state of mind—unless we took steps to give him a watchman. And of course we couldn't do this for the mate without doing it for the skipper as well; because we couldn't tell which way the thing was going to end, and it'd be most provoking for all of us to have the Old Man come out on top if any partiality had been shown the other chap.

No one of us was able to get away from his work to watch either of them for more than a little while at a time, so we had to divide the job. This meant the men made their choice as to which they wanted to favor, and the crew just naturally split up into two camps, with an understanding that it was only to see fair play and not for offensive purposes. Nevertheless, whenever a side was able to give its entry any information about the weaknesses of the other, it didn't get stiff in the knees hesitating to do it.

Ellis and I both lined up for Percival, because we liked him. There was something about his smile and the unconcerned way he took all that was coming to him, whether it was a hot liner from the Old Man or a cold meal from the cook, that made it a pleasure to have him around. Everybody took sides for one or the other—everybody, that is, except the second mate, the bosun, and the cook. We all insisted they'd have to stay neutral. It was too easy for the second mate and bosun to get excited and let the ship sink, and it was too easy for the cook to slip a few ptomaines into the grub for the one he wasn't backing.

So here we were, all set and merry, with the captain trying to murder the mate and the mate just as like as not to vice-versa the captain, with the crew divided against itself, everybody in a state of armed neutrality, with an elegant storm raging, a half-baked second mate and a wooden-headed bosun in charge of navigation, the ship seriously considering falling apart or sinking at any minute—and no one knowing how long any of it was going to last. Suffering soup-bones, how I longed to be at Mulligan's, sitting in a game of pinocle!

INSTEAD of getting better, the storm kept growing worse. It was so bad that although we pushed coal into her until the steam gage stuck, we couldn't do any more than keep her facing it. I was for turning around and coming home, but they told me she'd turn over quick as a wink if we tried that. The only hope, they said, was to keep her heading up into it, on the chance that the storm would blow over her and go by.

Down where we were working, with iron walls all round, the jarring the waves were giving her sounded tremendous. It was as if a great big something or other was knocking on the outside with a whopper of a wooden mallet, trying to get in. And there were a good many times when we thought he was coming right through. Then frequently we'd get a smash from underneath that would make the soles of our feet sting. I asked the second engineer how deep it was along there, and he said he guessed about a mile and a half; and I said I wouldn't have believed we'd been under water that long,

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and it was a good thing it wasn't a couple of feet shallower, or we'd be scraping the bottom out of her.

We upped and downed in that spot for three days until we got to know each individual wave by name and could almost draw a map of the bed of the ocean just by the sense of touch. There was one bump we called "Old Mortality" because he seemed to stick up higher than the others, and every time we hit him we expected to see a piece of rock come up through the floor. And then we'd yell to the *Hesperus* to move over where it was deeper.

Those days were mighty busy ones, what with working the ship and caring for our battling mastodons. Black Bill kept on getting madder. I suppose the shock of realizing he was having difficulty finishing what he had started was turning his head. I never heard of any one who could hate as he hated the mate. No one of our side was ever allowed to get near enough his headquarters to find out much, but there were signs that his keepers were having plenty to do. Percival, on the other hand, never gave us a bit of trouble. When they finished one of their bouts, which was when they were too fagged out to do more than lean against each other, and we'd drag them apart and convey them to their respective bunks, he would look up and ask us how the ship was doing.

"That's good enough," he'd say, when we'd tell him. "Keep her face into it. It don't make any difference what any one else says, the big smokers come with the wind. If that scrub-covered missing link would agree to a truce until we get fair weather, I'd come up and help. But so long as he wants fight, there's nothing to do but give it to him."

That was what Black Bill wanted, all right. He had long ago passed the stage of caring about anything else. I don't suppose that by this time he would have known what a truce meant. All he seemed to know was that as soon as he was strong enough to get under way, he should arise from his bunk and stagger forth to find and tame the wild youth from the jungles of the Pacific slope. And our side was supposed to pass the word in to the mate that the old bone-cracker was on the warpath.

That was all we were supposed to do—notify him of the black cloud on the horizon—but you can take it for granted we didn't stop there. Neither did the other side, as we found out afterward. We put in some of our best strokes helping Percival stay supple and limber, and taking the soreness out of his bruises. I'd done some rubbing for Dan McGonaghey, the Bronx Beauty, when he was up to fight Dave Klugschwartz, the Manhattan Maniac, so I was able to help.

It was like rubbing a bridge pillar, and I had to go slow until I was used to it, for fear of taking all the skin off my hands. He was in surprising good shape, everything considered. I mean by that, no bones were broken. His face was on somewhat of a slant; he was black and purple from the neck down, with a few white spots where the skin showed through; and some of his joints grated when he moved. But he could see out of both eyes and there never was a time when he wasn't in his right mind. In this he had it on Black Bill, who had only one light burning and dropped a stitch in his intellect every once in a while.

"What's that noise?" says Percival, when I'm trying the effect of a bit of machine-oil on a bruise that looked like a site for a town. "Is she blowing off?"

"That," I says, "is the skipper singing 'Hear me, Norma', a ballad of another day. When I came by, they were trying to soothe him and couldn't. Yesterday he sang 'The Last Rose of Summer.' He thinks he's Jenny Lind."

I could feel the mate laughing deep inside.

"Oh, my," he says, when he catches his breath. And then—"Ouch!" he yells, as I come down heavy on a bruise on his left hip. "Lean easy on that, will you?"

"It's this wild-cat of a ship," I says. "I was aiming for your right shoulder. Now then," I says, "take a drink of this and grab some sleep. I'll call you when he gets out of his cage."

The afternoon of the third day of the storm, the wind let up and we began to move. It was about time. When I put my head out the next morning, the old *Hesperus* looked as if they'd been dynamiting a creek somewhere and brought her to the surface. There was that order and tidiness about her decks that marks a restaurant in the movies after a comedian has gone in and come out. All the fixings were bent except a few, and those were smashed. But she was keeping afloat and going ahead, and that's all you can ask any ship to do.

The change in the weather meant the

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finish of the double shifts, so we had more time to ourselves and could pay more attention to our two gladiators. And they needed it. For practically five days they had been punching each other, and any man who has ever stopped a good rap with his jaw or beltline knows that to be getting them on most every delivery from Monday to Friday inclusive would be bound to have some slight effect. Of the two, though, Percival was a shade the freshest—due, I claim, to the excellent work of his trainers. He could even eat regular—anything he could chew—but judging by the plates and stuff going back from the other quarters, I don't think the Old Man was able to take any nourishment beyond a few raw eggs.

But the fighting went on, regardless. The skipper by now was so almighty desperate he was in a frame of mind to do anything, and we had to go all over the ship and bury whatever looked like a weapon. The men in his bodyguard were of the same opinion, not wanting any rough work, so they told. Even the cook said a wave had come in his place and swept away all the butcher knives, leaving only the pans and egg-beaters.

ABOUT noon on Sunday, Percival says he'd go up on the bridge; so I go with him. He asks the second mate where we were, and the second mate points to a pencil mark on a map of the ocean.

"I make it here," he says.

Then Percival takes a do-jigger and squints at the sun, and does a bit of figuring, and tells him he was close, but not quite right.

"Only about twenty miles off," he says.

His hands were so puffy he could hardly hold the pencil, but he does some more figuring, and tells him we should make a light off the Florida coast by two o'clock the next morning.

"It's flashing white," he says. "Keep on this course until you pick it up."

He was going on with directions when I send up a rocket.

"Ps-s-st!" I says. "Here comes the Sea Wolf."

Black Bill climbs the ladder to the bridge slowly and crosses it heavily, just about shaking it at every step. He stuck his head forward as he walked, making me think of a bulldog with whiskers, and as he had no hat on, I got a good look at his face. You've seen the fellow on the stage who throws a heap of soft clay on a board and then pushes it this way and that until he models the face of a man. This was the same thing, only Percival was reversing the process. He was working a human face back into soft clay. Every step the skipper took his cheeks and chin and eyebrows wabbled.

"Get below where you belong," he snarls at me, his one open eye glowing like a hot coal, and to the mate he says, "*I'll* navigate this ship, if you don't mind." And then he curses him shamefully.

"He's my guest," says Percival, referring to me, and he adds, cool as a stone—

"Navigate? You couldn't navigate yourself to a free drink at a German picnic."

Black Bill gave a squeal like a skittish elephant. I could have sworn I saw his ears flap. And then he rushed the mate and another instalment of the battle began. The second mate, the wheelman, and myself, we looked at each other and sighed wearily. That was the way we felt about this chronic warfare.

They'd been trading pile-driving hits so steady and so many days that now it took them longer to come round after every bout. This time I was downright worried about Percival. It was the first day we'd had to carry him to his bunk, and when we rolled him in, he fell off at once into a deep, stupid sleep, notwithstanding the fact I was rubbing him. After a while I roused him to take a drink, and it was a good thing I did. I heard a scraping and puffing in the alleyway, and here was Black Bill, just about able to travel, coming for more. He was lurching from side to side of the alleyway, dragging his feet and half groaning with pain, but he was coming—slow and sure as age.

I had Percival wide awake in a jiffy and he went out, and again they pushed and shoved each other around the decks. When we got Percival back, late in the afternoon, he was about done up. We called a quick conference, and it was agreed some of the others would split my shift in the fire-room and I should do nothing but doctor him. And we posted a sentry farther out where he could see the skipper's door. He was to let me know the minute the Old Man started our way, and that would give me plenty of time to get Percival on his feet.

I could tell by the motion of the ship and the sight of the waves through the porthole that there was a bit of a sea kicking

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up again, and when one of the boys brought supper in, he told me it didn't look particularly good off to the northeast. About seven o'clock Percival speaks his first word.

"Part of that same storm coming back, I guess," he says.

We were pitching pretty hard just then. I fed him and he went back to sleep.

Next time he spoke he asked how late it was. It was a quarter of two.

"Run up and ask the bridge if he has picked up the light yet," he says.

I called in the outpost and went up as per instructions. There were the second mate and bosun both staring ahead as hard as they could. Buckets of rain were coming in on a slant as if they were being squirted out of a high-pressure hose, with a whistling wind behind it that kept up a deep humming noise, and from somewhere out in the night long, low racing waves were hurdling us about as easy and graceful as a greyhound at top speed clearing a garden fence. When I asked the second mate if he had spotted the white light he went all to pieces.

"No, I haven't seen a light!" he yells. "I don't believe there is a light. Look there, I tell you—" he points off into the dark—"do *you* see anything that looks like a light? Tell that big muttonhead down there if he thinks there's a light, to come up here and find it. I've had about enough of this, I have." And then, just as sudden, he changes his tune—

"No, don't tell him that," he says. "Tell him it's thick and we haven't picked it up. Don't go too strong. Just tell him it's thick—see? That's enough. Oh!—" And he shakes both fists at the universe—"If I ever get out of this—if I ever——"

But I don't wait for the rest. I go down that crazy ladder like a shot and into Percival's room. When I tell him there's no sign of the light, he comes out of his bunk all standing. "No sign of it by this time?" he says to himself while I'm bending his arm to get it into a sleeve. "And us with a following wind! 'Tis strange," he mutters. "'Tis terrible strange."

I help him up to the bridge, and no sooner does he mark the force of the wind than he rings to the engine-room for half speed. Then he takes a good long look ahead. Finding nothing, he walks back to the telegraph and rings for slow speed, just enough to keep her headed right. The second mate swears the course hasn't been changed an inch.

"Then," says Percival, "the light is there. It's there—but whether it's lit is another question."

There's a growl from behind, and we discover we have the skipper with us. It seems he had been disturbed by the slowing up of the engines, and he wants to know why. The second mate tells him we're fishing for a light which the first mate said ought to be there. Of course, that's enough for Black Bill. Right then, in the dark and the storm, he lets himself go, and we get a good view of how little a man can like another and just how much of an exhibition he can make of himself when he loses his temper. The wind blows a good deal of his voice away, but we hear enough. And then with a wrench that nearly pulls the pillar out, he rings for full speed ahead.

"You'll pile her up!" shouts Percival, who had listened to the Old Man's raving without answering a word.

Back Bill waits for the vibration of the engines that shows they're speeding up, and leans towards the mate.

"Rot!" he bawls.

Not more than ten minutes later the bosun lets out a yell:

"Hear that!"

We all caught it—the last of a dull boom sounding miles away.

"It's a gun!" cries Percival. "A warning gun! Look!"

I couldn't see his arm, but I could tell which way he was facing, and I looked. Through the dark and the rain I could make out a little red glow. If anything ever spelled danger, that coastguard flare did.

The Old Man reaches for the telegraph, and we could feel the shaking of the engines as they did their best; but we might as well have tried to drive a canoe up Niagara Falls as to pull her out. With all of her eight and a half knots plus the speed of that snorter behind her, she hit the state of Florida such a lick it was a wonder she didn't cut a canal clear through it.

Then she gave herself a hump of the shoulders like a horse getting up from a slippery street, and everything stopped except a few of us movable articles. The skipper and Percival sat down in the rain, and the second mate, bosun and I hung ourselves suddenly on the front rail like washing on a fire escape balcony.

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We were all paralyzed for a minute. I remember cursing the man who gave me the first drink that led me to take a second that resulted in my getting drunk that moved me to take a New Haven train instead of a Bronx subway and landed me in Providence. Then a big wave hopped aboard with a vicious chuckle as if he was both surprised and delighted to find us there, and floated us into a corner so hard and so fast we got the pattern of the iron-work stamped on our persons. We had just time to untangle and jump for the nearest shelter when the second wave came. After that it seemed all the waves in the Atlantic had heard about us and wanted to play with us. We could hear them quarreling and crowding off there in the dark as each one tried to beat the others in.

The noise of the breakers was something terrific, and added to it was the creaking and complaining of the old *Hesperus* as they rolled and slapped her. I leaned over to Percival's ear and asked what the chances were of our getting off. He shook his head and said something, but I caught only a word now and then:

"—breaking up—pounding—pieces maybe—life-savers come—good thing they know—looks bad——"

He meant that the patrol had seen us hit and had gone for the life-saving crew, and until they came we wouldn't know whether we were going to get off alive or dead. All we could to was to hang on and shiver. For once in his life Black Bill was leaving everybody alone and saying nothing, but it struck me he probably was doing a lot of thinking. All the rest of the crew had joined us, and we stood together on the deck under the bridge, on the side toward the shore, which was about the most solid place on the boat. The force of the waves was broken by the deck-house, but every one of them washed us around a bit.

ABOUT an hour after we struck, we felt the ship give a quick shake and shift its position a foot or two. We looked back toward the stern, and it seemed that the faint whiteness which marked where the water was breaking over the decks stopped short almost in arm's reach. That was the only sign we had that about half the length of the hull had dropped off. Lucky for us, the forward half had jammed itself tight into a shoal and had quit moving.

About four o'clock a red flare broke out on the beach and cheered us up considerably, meaning as it did that the life-savers had arrived. I remembered seeing them give exhibitions at the St. Louis Fair, and I was proud of them then; but *now*—I could have kissed every one of them. Soon we marked the muffled bang of a gun, which was the men on the beach shooting a line at us. They missed us, and tried again. Three times they missed, and then we heard the line drop on what was left of the bridge above our heads.

We passed the bosun up there and got it, and hauled in a whip-line and hawser; and when Black Bill says to make it fast to the foremast, we jumped like man-o-war's men, even though the big waves went for us the minute we put our heads out. They got two of the boys, the waves did—two out of twenty-eight. That left twenty-six to go ashore.

It was desperate work getting up into the rigging on the foremast and then into the breeches buoy, and when my turn came it was on my tongue to say that maybe I ought to stay and let somebody else go; but just at that moment the remains of the ship gave a lurch that made my heart come up in my throat, and I changed my mind. None of us needed a diagram to tell us she was loosening again and in danger of dissolving like a piece of loaf sugar. So I climbed in, and then the line tightened from the shore, and away I went.

I was the tenth to go, and by that time the darkness was diluted with enough light so I could see the waves. I didn't like them at all. Great, long-toothed monsters they were, reaching up for me, and where the line sagged and let me down into them, they chewed at me as if they hadn't tasted meat for a month. I had just about all the salt water I could hold when the boys dumped me out on the soil of this glorious republic and started the breeches buoy back to the *Hesperus*.

As fast as we were able, we buckled to and helped the surfmen, keeping that breeches-buoy see-sawing back and forth so quick we were scared the tackle would catch afire. But the keeper was at us for speed, and he seemed to know what he was talking about. The wreck, he said, was breaking up at an amazing rate and was liable to open up and let the foremast go any minute. When that happened, he said,

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it would be taps for those who were left on board.

The rain had stopped and we could see them—the few that were left. When the high ones—the waves big as houses—were rolling in on the beach, of course we couldn't see a thing, but as soon as they broke and flattened out, we could look over them. There wasn't much of the ship above water. The funnel was there, tilted badly, and the foremast—and in the rigging that led up to it were the figures of men that looked no bigger than children. The skipper and the mate were among them, we knew, but we couldn't pick them out. One by one the men came away and the cluster in the rigging grew smaller.

There were only three left—Black Bill, Percival, and the bosun—when she caved in and let the foremast fall. All we could see was a part of her midships, with that silly looking funnel, and even this went in a few minutes. We hauled on the line to see if we could pull the mast out of her and bring it in, maybe with somebody hanging to it, but we couldn't budge it. So then the keeper spread us out along the beach for about a mile to watch for them.

It was ghastly work, waiting for what the sea might be pleased to throw up on shore. There wasn't any harm in hoping, but it was asking a good deal to expect a man to come out of that boiling mess alive. And I'd grown to like the first mate a whole lot, and it made me good and bitter to think he should have to die for the mistake of a bull-headed blackguard like the Old Man. The only consolation I could find was that the sea would probably take Black Bill also, and in taking him would drown out of him the hate and the envy that had driven him to try for seven days to beat the spirit out of the boy.

Of a sudden I heard a shout close by and saw the men running toward a surfman who was waving his arms. Out in the water, rising on the top of a wave and then dropping down out of sight, was a piece of wreckage with a dark lump at the side of it. The sight sent the blood through me like a stream of hot oil and I started into the breakers. The way I felt, I could have waded through to the coast of Spain. But the keeper nailed me and held me until they'd passed a line around my waist, and then they let me go, while the rest of them lined up in a human chain and followed as far as they could and keep their footing.

I had a hope that Percival was somewhere in that dark lump at the edge of the piece of wreckage, and the wave didn't live that was going to stop me. Whenever I could open my mouth I filled up with air, and the waves could do what they liked after that, so long as they didn't get under me. I knew if they did, they'd probably throw me over to Mobile. So I took them on the head and shoulders and bored through them, and finally my hand caught on something solid. It was the wreckage.

The men behind me didn't lose any time. As soon as they saw I had hold of it they began pulling, and I came back, wreckage and all, a heap quicker than I'd gone out. I had a sensation that everything was loose and I was going a long, long way, when something gripped me by the foot and brought me to a full stop. In a minute I was sitting on the beach, a bit upset, watching them drag something up on the sand. And when I saw what it was I felt a thrill. It was a man-sized thrill. The nearest I ever come to it before was once when I was helping the janitor mend some electric wiring, and grabbed the wrong wire.

For here we had the side of the wheelhouse of the *Hesperus*, and two men—Percival and Black Bill. And Percival's left arm was hooked through the window opening of the wheelhouse, and his right was around Black Bill, holding him up—and both of them to all appearances dead as pickled beets. And so tight were Percival's two arms locked—the one through the window and the other around Black Bill—that it took the life-savers about five minutes to pry the skipper free. It was easier to separate the mate from the wreckage by simply smashing the woodwork.

The life-savers went to work on them right away. The first to show signs of life was Black Bill, notwithstanding he had a cut on his head that showed he had receipted for an awful wallop. He was hustled off to the station and put to bed.

Percival didn't give a flutter for another half-hour. The life-savers said this was because his head had been under water more, on account of him holding up the weight of the skipper. I was one of the squad that rushed him to the station and tucked him away between the blankets, while the rest stayed behind to look for the bosun. Poor

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fellow, he didn't come ashore until noon, which was about four hours too late.

When we reached the station, Black Bill was wide awake and taking nourishment, and as soon as they had bandaged his head, he got up. He said that when the wreck opened and let everything go, the three of them went over the side. Almost immediately he was hit by a piece of the falling mast. He had seen it coming just as he rose to the surface, but wasn't quick enough to get away. That was all he remembered.

Then the life-savers told him about the light. There had been an accident at the lighthouse two days before, they said, which completely destroyed the lamp. Until it could be replaced, they were doing their best to warn ships off by the gun and flare. Most vessels, of course, had been notified by wireless that the light was out. They were sorry they hadn't been able to advise the *Hesperus;* it was hard luck he hadn't gone to the bother of fitting her with the necessary equipment.

And when they had explained all this, they told him how he had been brought ashore.

The Old Man listened without any show of interest and made no comment when they finished. But later, when I was sitting alone by Percival's cot, watching for him to wake up so I could give him some beef broth I was keeping warm on an oil-stove, the door of the room opened several times for an inch or two, and framed in the crack was a strip of face that was bounded on the north by a white bandage and on the south by a clump of black whiskers.

After a while, Percival moved and opened his eyes.

"Greetings," I says. And he smiles.

Black Bill must have been waiting with his ear glued to a hole in the wall, because I've no sooner said it than the door opens softly and in he comes. He isn't very steady on his feet, but he crosses the room with the same you-can-not-escape-me manner that I'd noticed so many times before. The thought that he was going to jump on Percival when he's down, and maybe murder him, sends a chill along my spine, and as I stand up I reach under me for the chair I've been sitting on, catching it by the leg.

"Right here," I says to myself, "is where this episode comes to an end. One overt act," I says, "and it's his last."

For all the notice the Old Man took of me, I might have been in Tokio. He stops beside the cot and looks down at the mate for maybe a full minute. And Percival just lies there and looks up into his eyes as steady as if he's gazing at a picture.

Then Black Bill's hand goes out and he speaks. But his voice is husky.

"Put it there!" he says.

And Percival grips it—and grins. And Black Bill grins a bigger grin back at him. And I go out and leave the Old Man to give him the beef broth that's keeping warm on the stove.

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When a Man's Hungry

by Henry Oyen

Author of "Gaston Olaf," "Rugged Sons of the Woods," etc.

"AWFUL Bill" Dunn took one final look around at the empty, desolate snow-world in which he found himself, and sat down and began to whimper.

Bill was hungry. He was very hungry. The cold, gnawing pain at the pit of his stomach had become agony, and his limbs were beginning to tremble.

It was cold, too. Bill's bones, the joints especially, were aching with the torture of frost which had crept in through his flesh since the fire, three nights ago, had consumed his cabin, furs, rifle, and food. His face had been as wood for a day now, so Bill knew that he was frost-bitten. He didn't mind that, however. He could have borne it cheerfully, if only he had something to eat.

Not much. He was not greedy in his desires. A chunk of dry bread, for instance. What bliss it would have been to feel the hard stuff crunching between one's teeth! And suppose the bread had a little strip of bacon on it, just a little. Awful Bill collapsed, whimpering like a frozen dog.

All in all it was no place for Bill Dunn out there alone on the frozen barrens. Men who go forth into that desolation to seek furs of a Winter should be—and are—a hard breed, who, in Bill's present circumstance, would tighten the belt and lurch on with a sneering curse at Fate on their shriveled lips.

Bill was not of a hard breed. He was a round little man who grew wet-eyed after his fourth drink, used a row-boat because it was safer than a canoe, and played the accordion lugubriously. The Summer before he had taken a girl to a dance at Flambeau settlement. Little Pierre Lajoie had invited him to drink, and ere the drinks had been served Pierre disappeared. Presently friends came to Dunn at the bar.

"Hey, Bill; Pierre's out there sparking your girl."

Bill had stared painfully around until his eyes focused upon Pierre's untouched drink.

"The son-of-a-gun!" he gasped furiously. "I'll drink his beer!"

Thus he had won the name of Awful Bill; and he had made the trip into the barrens with the idea of winning a better reputation.

He should never have tried it. He knew that now. As he shuddered beneath the pangs of hunger he knew that he should have remained near Flambeau. Say a two-day trail away. Then a man could get in easily even if a fire did destroy his grub. There was food at Flambeau—oh! what a lot of food they had there.

Bill judged that it was about noon. Well, at this time every person in Flambeau was eating. Bread, bacon, moose-meat, dough-gods, rabbit meat, tea. . . A sudden spasm bent the starving man double. It wasn't fair. He wasn't built for such hardship. He sobbed and, sobbing, staggered on. And like a mirage his memory

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held before him pictures of solid, nourishing food he had eaten in years gone by.

In the middle of the afternoon Bill realized that he was lost. In his tortured frame of mind he had wandered thoughtlessly from the trail, and he was on a frozen creek-bed which was strange to him. He looked in vain for some landmark, searched his memory for knowledge of which creek it might be. No; it was a new creek to him. He had never heard of any stream in that direction. Probably one that had never been explored. Well, it made no difference. Nothing made any difference except the pangs of hunger which must be stilled or he would die.

The thought of dying did not trouble Bill greatly. He was too hungry. If he could only get something to eat he wouldn't bother about anything else. Food—there was nothing else in the world that mattered. Bill staggered on.

II

WHEN the deepening grayness of the eastern horizon warned that the end of the brief Winter day was approaching, he stopped suddenly. Had he really heard something, or was his mind playing tricks? He leaned forward, listening eagerly. Then an animal gurgle of delight roared from his throat. There was no mistake about it; somewhere down the river, beyond the next bend, some one was chopping wood.

Bill hurried on down the river bed, gurgling inarticulately. He forgot his weakness and broke into a run. He was going to eat!

As he rounded the bend and saw a dugout, cunningly hidden in a curve of the creek, he gave vent to a bellow of agonized relief. The man who was chopping wood before the dugout dropped his ax and whirled swiftly around. The man acted strangely. He gave one swift glance up the creek, then sprang for his door.

A moment later a rifle bullet whistled so close to Bill's head that he threw himself flat on the snow. A second bullet shattered the crust within an inch of his face. By the time the third shot was fired he had rolled himself out of sight behind the bend.

Bill did not utter a sound. He lay hugging the bank, waiting for more shots. They did not come. A door slammed. After a long while Bill clambered up the bank and, peering through the willows, saw that the man at the dugout had shut himself in.

Dunn lay among the willows and stared for a considerable length of time. There was the dugout, with its windowless front of logs and its roof of dirt and brush; in front of it lay the ax and a small pile of wood. Smoke curled up through an opening in the roof; and the door was closed tight. Bill regarded the cozy smoke especially.

"He's got eats," was his verdict. "He don't want to give me any."

He was not angry. Food was the most precious thing in the world, and it was only natural that a man who possessed it should guard it against all comers. He saw nothing to marvel at in the man's strange inhospitality. He had got beyond that. The only thing that impressed him just then was the colossal fact that there was food, probably plenty of it, down in that hostile dugout. And Bill noted where the bullet had broken the snow and was not afraid.

"He's got grub in there," he whispered softly; "he's got grub!" This fact held him riveted. The man and his rifle made him shudder as he thought of them, but the shudder was only skin-deep, only an involuntary spasm produced by Bill's normal fear of such things. It didn't trouble him much, it did not drive him away for safety. The fact was that most of the normal Bill for the present was dead, and the part of him that was alive was the belly that would not let him leave the vicinity of the dugout and its food.

Like a starved wolf lurking about a settler's barnyard, where it knows death waits with noise and fire, and yet cannot leave because of the meat it smells, so Awful Bill crouched there in the bare willow copse on the bank of the creek. It was a mad thing to do, considering that he was unarmed; for the man had only to come out, track him down and shoot him as one might a helpless porcupine. Yet Bill, Awful Bill, who deserved his mocking nickname, remained. He was not brave. He was not constituted so he could be brave. He was hungry.

When the thickening gray in the sky had become the black of night Bill moved. Like a wolf, or any wild animal stalking a stationary victim, he began to circle. He had

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to get near the dugout, there was food there, and the most primal of all needs now controlled him.

He could not approach the door; the man was sure to have a peep-hole. Having missed with three shots, he would take his time and make sure with the fourth. Bill put a hog-back between himself and the dugout and began to work to the rear.

After half an hour of arduous crawling he found himself on a high bank looking down on the dugout roof. The evening wind blew smoke from the opening into his nose and Bill trembled, for he smelled cooking. He sniffed greedily, and the unmistakable odor that came to his nostrils roused his hunger-pangs to raging. Burnt meat! There was no doubt of it. The man had put meat on the fire before he stepped out to cut his wood. In the excitement the meat had fallen or been knocked into the fire. It was burning. Fine, juicy meat! Bill sobbed.

He looked at the ax, lying where the man had dropped it, but desperation had not killed caution, and he instantly gave up the swiftly formulated thought of chopping his way in. The man inside—inside where the food was—had a rifle. Bill was too hungry to take chances at short range; he must be foxy, very foxy, or he'd never taste that food.

After a while the idea came. Bill backed away from the bank and ran to the copse of willows. Here he became suddenly very busy. He tore off his mittens and began to gather dry willow twigs. The cold nipped his fingers, but in the dark a man had to work barehanded to tell by feel the dead twigs from the live. When he had gathered a sizable bunch of twigs he became more ambitious; he began to pull down dead saplings and break them into short lengths. A few stunted spruce-trees grew near the willows and Bill added their branches to his pile.

"He hasn't got a dog," he chortled. "The —— fool hasn't got a dog."

He removed his long sash and cunningly tied it around his wood, the dry twigs at the bottom, the spruce limbs on top. It made a sizable load, and putting it on his back, Bill crawled slowly toward the dugout.

It took him a long time to reach his destination. Time after time he paused, lying flat on the snow beneath his load, quite sure that he heard the door opening. Each yard he expected to be discovered, to see the door fly open and the man thrusting forth his rifle; but he did not retreat; he was too hungry.

When the pile had been laid softly against the very door of the dugout Bill hurriedly struck a match. The tiny dry twigs at the bottom caught eagerly at the flame. They spread it; it shot up among the thicker pieces and caught them; it rose higher, into the spruce branches, and soon the front of the dugout was covered with a pall of thick, resinous smoke.

Then the door flew open. The man appeared in the doorway, staggered back, swore, and came with a rush, kicking the fire away. He came through the smoke and flame, and as he halted, blinded and coughing, Bill leaped. He locked his hands on the man's bare throat. He did not let go his hold—he was too hungry.

III

BILL stopped eating for a moment some time in the middle of the night.

"Say!" he chuckled through a mouthful of beans, "you had grub to last till the Spring break-up, didn't you?"

The stern, gray-haired man who lay spread-eagled, tied hand and foot to the four corners of the bunk, shot a single glance at Bill and Bill trembled—for he was hungry no longer.

"What for are you so killing mad at me, pop?" he queried ingratiatingly. "I ain't such a bad fellow——"

"Drop that!" The man spoke in a quiet tone, unafraid. "You got me. Your smoke trick was good. Take me down to the fort and have it over with. But don't rub it in by getting funny."

This speech puzzled Bill so that he consumed another pound of beans before speaking again.

"Who'd you kill?" he asked cutting a piece of bacon.

The old man eyed Bill steadily for a full minute, and the killing light went out of his gray eyes, and he smiled wryly, as a game man may smile at a fatal joke he has played on himself. Bill grinned back.

"Well, I'll be eternally jumped up and damned!" muttered the old man. "You wasn't after me at all, eh?"

Bill waddled over and cut the lashings

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and went back to the table and resumed his eating.

"It was a thieving half-breed, if you want to know," continued the fugitive, "but the police got to bother you about them, too. He was my pardner and I caught him robbing my food cache."

"The —— —— ——!"

"Yep. So I got him, and hid out."

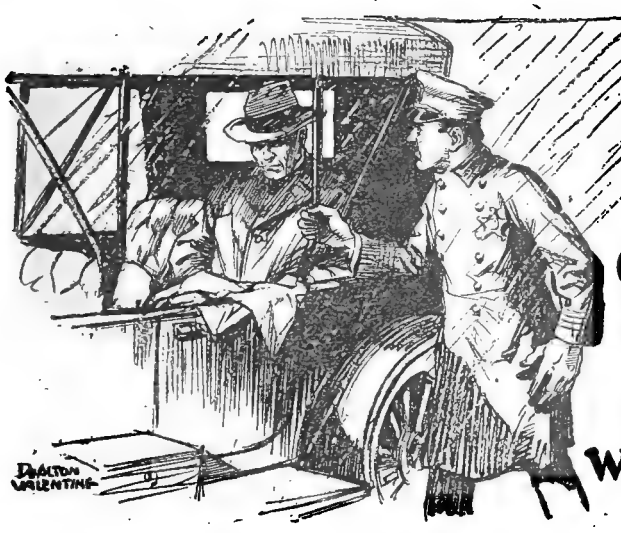
"Good work!" said Bill through the beans.

The old man carefully rubbed his throat where Bill had clutched him.

"You're a hard one, neighbor," he said, admiringly. "Yes, sir; you certainly are hard."

Bill chuckled luxuriously as he spread bacon grease on a dough-god.

"Who? Me? A hard one? No sir!" he said. "I ain't hard—but I certainly was hungry."



Old Colonel Ptolemy

by

William A. Shryer

IT WAS the middle of January, and for the past three days the mercury had hovered with obstinate consistency well below zero. Lieutenant Balch, of the Detroit Metropolitan Police Department, had delayed his departure for home with studied purpose, a contemplation of the long ride in a cross-town car affording little or no allurement. It seemed especially futile also since official business demanded his return to headquarters again at nine o'clock.

There was little to suggest the uxorious in the hard, square jaw of the lieutenant, but experience, however, had emphasized for him that a valid excuse was decidedly more preferable than any expression of personal inclination.

Devoid of a convincing imagination, the officer therefore prepared for departure with resignation, struggling into his great-coat reluctantly as the clock in the city finished striking the hour of six. Turning to the door he was about to make a lagging exit, to find himself confronted by a traffic-policeman with a request for a moment of the lieutenant's time.

"We just towed in an old Ford car," the policeman reported. "It didn't have any license tag front or rear, and there's a dead man in the tonneau, frozen stiff. Byrne's watching the machine over in front of the morgue. I thought it best to report before doing anything further, sir."

"Glad you did," responded Balch, with an appearance of relief somewhat perplexing to the traffic man. "I'll go right over with you. Telephone my wife I'm detained on official business," he directed one of his subordinates briskly.

The two hastened out and quickly entered the still chugging D. P. D. machine that had brought the traffic-policeman to headquarters. On their way to the morgue the policeman explained that a telephone message had been received about three-quarters

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of an hour before, advising that an old Ford car, without license-tags, had been standing for some time between the alley and Lafayette on Cass. On reaching the spot the top and hood had been found covered with snow, and there were no marks to show that the snow had been disturbed either in front or back of the car.

During the previous night there had been a heavy downfall of "the beautiful," which had ceased well before ten that morning, however. As the wheels were surrounded by quite two and a half inches of snow it was evident that the car had stood for at least eight hours without causing any official scrutiny.

"Do you mean to tell me," snapped the lieutenant, "that this car stood for eight hours that near to the center of town without being picked up long ago?"

"Well, it's hardly any fault of ours," responded the traffic man with respectful decision. "Since the commissioner had that run-in with the council over his new traffic regulations we've had orders to let everybody park wherever they like and for as long as they please. If this old bus hadn't happened to be without license-tags it might have stood there for days. Looked perfectly natural at that, with a man apparently waiting in the back seat.

"We didn't suspect anything was the matter till we got in and shook him. He sat perfectly straight, and was bundled up in one of those old-fashioned raincoats with a hood attached to the back of the collar. You can see for yourself. Looks like he's just waiting for somebody now."

As the policeman finished his explanation the police car arrived beside the machine in front of the morgue, when the lieutenant was forced to admit there was nothing in the appearance of the dead man to arouse any suspicion in the casual passer-by.

An inspection of the machine disclosed the fact that it was an old model of at least four years ago, in a general state of dilapidation, eloquent of extremely hard and constant usage. With the help of the waiting Byrne the two men carried the corpse within, where the body was quickly divested of its snow-covered rubber ulster. The latter was several sizes too large, and after being submitted to a cursory examination was thrown aside, as affording no likely clues of identity.

The body was found to be rigid and stiff, resisting all efforts to reduce it to a horizontal position. Placed on his back the dead man lay with his legs bent to a sitting posture, the feet dangling in gruesome fashion about a foot and a half above the marble slab.

The shoes were apparently of the best quality, but in a style almost forgotten, the sharp points reminiscent of the dandy of 1895. The thin grayish-brown hair, meticulously parted in the middle, was also suggestive of an old-time beau, which effect was further emphasized by the smooth clean-shaven face with that marked ruddiness of cheek usually associated with a powder box and a rabbit's foot. A tentative rub with the palm of his hand convinced the lieutenant that this coloring was quite real, however unexpected in a man of the victim's age, which was apparently between forty-five and fifty.

The clothes of the dead man were quite in keeping with his general appearance. His suit was of the best material, of black and white check goods decidedly thin for any protection from the present inclemency of the weather. The coat, vest and custom-made silk shirt stripped from the body exposed to view a blue silk undershirt with a small round hole directly over the heart. A hole of the same size appeared in the body when stripped of the shirt. The man had been shot through the body.

"Now what do you think of that?" complained the officer. "Shot in his undershirt then dressed up and carted to within a few feet of a busy corner. Somebody's had a lot of nerve. Must have washed out the shirt, as well as cleaned up the wound, too—there ain't a speck of blood on either."

An examination of the clothing discovered nothing in any of the pockets. On neither coat nor vest was there any label. A maker's tag on the inside of both shoes had been carefully cut out with a sharp knife.

As the lieutenant was scratching his ear and shaking his head in perplexity the patrolman, Byrne, was going through all the pockets a second time. As he came to the inside vest pocket he discovered a very small safety-pin fastened near the bottom. Pulling the pocket inside out it was found that a small slit ran across the side near the bottom and that the pin held in position between the lining and the outer cloth, a small rustling packet of several folds of stiff paper.

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THE lieutenant reached for the garment, and unpinning the papers withdrew them through the slit from their hiding-place. The three watched the unfolding of the small packet with keen expectancy, which rapidly changed to the greatest astonishment. The papers were but two in number, a check on the Continental National Bank of New York City, and a hundred-dollar bill.

The check was dated January 2, 1917, drawn to the order of George R. Worthington, and signed by a scrawl more convincing than legible. In the lower left-hand corner was written "1916 dividend." The amount of the check was $55,888.94. The hundred-dollar bill was dated 1862. It was a bank-note of the Southern Confederacy.

"Holy Mother!" gasped the patrolman Byrne. "Who'd have thought we were towing in all that kale?"

"I'll look after this case myself," growled Balch, with a sudden accession of dignity and importance. "Hand in your regular report to the Detective Bureau and get back on your jobs."

The lieutenant hastened back to his office and detailed two men to the neighborhood in which the car had been discovered. He made it clear that he expected to learn just when that Ford car had been parked in the spot where it was found. Moreover he expected to be told with some degree of definiteness the appearance of the person or persons who had abandoned it there.

With this start of an investigation perfected the lieutenant repaired to a near-by restaurant, where he found a perfectly satisfactory substitute for the cheer he had been denied in the bosom of his family, returning leisurely to his office at seven-thirty. Somewhat to his surprise he found awaiting him one of the men he had sent out but a short while before. What surprised him more was a report in greater keeping with his instructions than any previous experience warranted him in expecting so promptly.

"The Ford car without license tags was parked on the East side of Cass between Lafayette and the alley at a quarter to four yesterday evening," his subordinate reported. "There's a woman lives directly opposite who just got back from a day's visit to Dearborn. She left the house yesterday at a quarter of four, as she had to make a four o'clock Interurban car at Michigan and Cass, so remembered the time exactly.

"She says it was drove up by a rather short thick-set man with a humped back and fiery red hair. She noticed him particular, as she thought at the time she'd certainly like to touch his hump for good luck. He jumped out in a hurry and bumped into a man as he was hustling toward Lafayette. She didn't notice anything else."

"Good for you," the sleuth was praised by his superior. "Where's Blick?"

"He's making inquiries around the neighborhood to find out if anybody saw a humpback after he hit Lafayette. It's a bad corner to dig up any dope, though. Transient boarding-houses on two corners, an empty building on one and the new Elks Temple going up on the other. What'll I do now?"

"Go on back and help Blick. It ought to be easy to pick up a red-headed humpback."

Considerably pleased with himself the lieutenant was more affable than usual in his reception of the reporters for the morning papers on their regular appearance that evening. With great wealth of detail he described the mysterious surroundings of what he considered the most promising murder case of the year. He exhibited the check and the Confederate bill with considerable pride, explaining their discovery as a particular mark of his personal acumen.

To the reporters the case exhibited plenty of material for lurid exposition, one poetic scribe going so far as to describe the victim as probably a Southern millionaire of undying patriotism, hugging to his faithful breast a pathetic remembrance of an all too fleeting dream of national greatness. Despite the dearth of information regarding the possible identity of the victim, the efforts of the police were described as extremely prompt and efficient, and because of the scanty nature of the information available each step so far taken was elaborated to the full.

A tangible result of this publicity disclosed itself shortly after the lieutenant had reached his office early the next morning. He found a pudgy, bellicose individual awaiting him, who pointed to the story of the murder in the city edition of the *Herald*.

"I'm the man that red-headed humpback bumped into," reported this gratuitous advisor. "He almost knocked me down, and

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I thought at the time that he did it on purpose. I see now it was about the last thing he would have wanted to do, of course. I bawled him out though and threatened to lick him on the spot. Would of too, if he'd been able-bodied. He beat it for the avenue and flagged the first machine that came along."

"Did you happen to notice the number of that car?" inquired the officer excitedly.

"No, of course not," retorted the man. "But it was a Yellow Bonnet taxi, and it ought to be a cinch to find the driver and learn where he took him."

"Sure," the officer thanked the man effusively. "Much obliged. If I can do you a favor at any time call me up."

The man departed, leaving the lieutenant to act on his very sensible suggestion. A telephone message to the garage of the Yellow Bonnet resulted in the information that the taxi-driver had already spoken to the boss about the humpback, after reading the story of the murder in the morning paper.

The driver had left with his car for his regular station but a few moments before, with the announcement that he intended to call at headquarters some time during the morning. The manager agreed to get hold of him at once, however, and demand his presence at the garage by ten o'clock at the latest.

The lieutenant was on hand promptly and was introduced by the manager to the taxi-driver. The latter, a sharp-faced, intelligent young giant, was keenly interested, and not entirely insensible to his own importance.

"There ain't no doubt about it, Lieut.," he assured the officer, "the guy I picks up about four o'clock night before last is the bird you want all right. Stands about five-feet-four, a humped back, and a head of hair as red as a tail lamp. Tells me to beat it to the Michigan Central and jumps out in a —— of a hurry, with the exact clock fare in one hand and a five-case note in the other. He hikes for the ticket window and I beats it back. He's a cheap guy at that, you can take it from me. He don't slip me even a jitney."

"Good," ejaculated the lieutenant, slipping his informant a three-for-a-quarter cigar. "Just keep your trap closed."

"I get you. So long, Lieut."

The officer hastened back to his office and detailed one of his men to investigate the mysterious humpback's movements after reaching the railroad station. On the departure of the subordinate the lieutenant called up the Ford Motor Company and gave the number of the dilapidated machine, requesting that a record of its original ownership be afforded him at the earliest possible moment. In less than an hour the desired information was telephoned back.

THE officer was told that the machine had been sold to a dealer in Flint, Michigan, in 1913. No record of its purchaser was immediately available of course. The car had been completely overhauled in 1915 at the Ford branch of Woodward Avenue and the Boulevard, however, and its owner at that time was a man named Arthur Bonebright, whose address was 182 Lysander Street.

The lieutenant found the name of the latter in the telephone book, and secured a telephone connection with him at once. Mr. Bonebright advised that the car had been sold by him within three days of its coming from the shop. He advised further that he had bought the machine second-hand and sold it through a want ad, receiving two hundred and eighty-five dollars spot cash for the car from a man he thought was a dealer in second-hand autos.

He was entirely too thankful to dispose of the "piece of junk" to even inquire the name of the purchaser. He gave his personal opinion that "any one buying it would unload it as quickly as possible on the first sucker that appeared," and that to attempt tracing a second-hand Ford of that age was a hopeless task. To attempt discovering its probable peregrinations appealed to the lieutenant as a waste of time also, and after jotting down these results, dismissed the clue from further consideration.

The check found on the dead man's body, however, appealed to him as a much more promising source of valuable information, Under ordinary circumstances he would have dispatched a wire to the Continental National Bank in New York, but such a proceeding bore little promise under the circumstances. It was extremely doubtful that the bank would know anything whatever of the payee, and all efforts to decipher the chirography of the drawer of the check had been discouragingly fruitless.

No less than ten men in the department

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had examined the scrawling signature. Beyond a mutual agreement that the name commenced with an "A" and finished with a "Co.," the combined results of their opinions afforded conclusions as diverse as the characters of the amateur handwriting experts themselves. The lieutenant therefore ordered a photograph of the check, which he proposed to mail to the bank as soon as completed.

The officer enjoined the greatest speed in turning the check over to the photographer, as he appreciated that even the apprehension of the driver of the abandoned car might leave a good deal to be desired in the absence of any clue to the identity of the victim. The description of the dead man in the morning paper had been more than sufficiently lucid to call forth some news of his identity, had he been a man known to any of the thousands of readers, as the story had appeared on the first page, under a double-column head.

It was now almost noon and no word in relation to any phase of the tragedy had reached headquarters, with the exception of that relating to the actions of the red-headed humpback.

Regarding the activities of the latter the lieutenant was confronted by a most baffling report on his return from lunch at one-thirty. His investigator was there awaiting him, as the task to which he had been allotted proved ridiculously easy and simple, up to a certain point. Beyond that point it had become apparently impossible.

The plain-clothes man reported that he found no difficulty in picking up the trail of the humpback at once. The latter had purchased a ticket for the four-ten train for Chatham, Ontario. The ticket-seller remembered him perfectly. The red-headed humpback had aroused the ire of the ticket man by heatedly alleging that in receiving change from a five-dollar bill he had been "short changed" ten cents, securing back but three dollars and a half instead of three dollars and sixty cents.

This fact alone would have been sufficient to cause a definite recollection, as the railroad agent complained it had been the first claim made against him of that kind during his six years' service with the railroad company.

As the departure of the train was then being called the humpback had hastened on without making a more than voluble protest, and a sleeping-car collector in the subway remembered having directed a man of his description to the proper stairway leading to the Chatham train. As it so happened the detective found the Canadian immigration officers on the platform awaiting the departure of a noon train. Inquiry developed the fact that one of the inspectors had been on duty two days before and had been one of the two that had examined the passengers on the four-ten train on that date.

This officer reported that the red-headed humpback had been particularly noticed by him. In fact he had stopped him with a request regarding the man's destination, and remembered it had been for Chatham. This inspector did not remember having seen the humpback on the train after it left Windsor through the tunnel. He assumed that the humpback must have passed through to another car, in which case his partner would be the one to see regarding any further information.

The detective therefore boarded the train about to depart, and on reaching the Canadian side was introduced by the inspector to his partner of two days before. The second inspector had seen no red-headed humpback two days before, and was positive in his recollection. Moreover there had been but two immigration inspectors on duty that afternoon. One had seen the man board the train, which had departed almost immediately. Neither of them had seen the man thereafter, and there had been absolutely no manner in which a passenger could escape from the train while going through the tunnel under the Detroit River. The humpback had simply disappeared.

"There's one sure thing," the detective concluded. "This red-headed bird wasn't on that train when it pulled into Windsor. You can't get by those inspectors nowadays. Ever since the war started you have to give a history of your life if they think you look in the least out of the ordinary, and that gink could never get by without more than the once over.

"If he slipped off a platform to the other side of the train before it started he was —— slick about it, for the guards at each end of the train-sheds are wise guys, and swear no such man even tried to pass them. The gatemen swear that he never came back through the front way—and there you are."

"I suppose it's no use to wire Chatham,"

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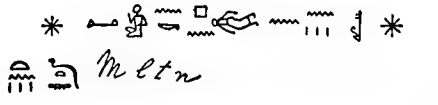
grumbled the disappointed lieutenant, "but run along and do it anyway. You might stick around, and if anything turns up I can put you out on it."

As the plain-clothes man was leaving the office a morose, dumpy Irishman waddled in and saluted the lieutenant.

"Here's a bit of an exhibit fer ye, Lieut.," he grumblingly announced, extricating a blue traveling-cap from his hip pocket. "Ye remember the stiff with his feet in the air, now? I was taggin' his clothes, whin I found this cap in the hood of 'is mackintosh. It's got a queer badge or other sewed to the front ov it, so I fetched it over."

THE officer accepted the proffered exhibit, and was considerably perplexed on examining the "queer badge" referred to by the morgue attendant. The cap itself was in no way out of the ordinary, but carefully sewed directly across the front, just above the narrow vizor, was a strip of stiff white linen, on which the following cabalistic figures had been very carefully printed or drawn:



"What in the devil do you suppose those hen scratchings mean?" exclaimed the thoroughly bewildered lieutenant.

"I ain't no sign artist meself," responded the Irishman, "but I gave Doc. Mears a slant at it as I was leavin' and he says to me it's higher glifics, whatever them is. Some Egyptian faro signals, or the likes of that, he says."

"Egyptian stuff, eh?" responded the officer. "May be a good clue at that. Much obliged to you, Casey, and don't let on we failed to spot this before."

"I get you, Lieut."

On the departure of the fat little Irishman the lieutenant took stock with himself for the better part of a quarter of an hour, coming to the final decision that the case to date had scarcely developed with the skill and efficiency likely to justify as favorable a conclusion as he felt his self-esteem demanded.

Having reluctantly conceded to himself more than he would have been willing to admit to almost any one else, he at least decided that a little outside help was highly desirable. He was spurred to this decision by a sudden association of ideas aroused in his mind by the unexpected suggestion of an Egyptian flavor. Relying on the latter as a fitting excuse he accordingly called a number on the Hemlock exchange.

"Hello, is this Mr. Josiah Simms?" he called with unaccustomed affability. "This is Lieutenant Balch, sir. Been reading the papers today Mr. Simms?—Yes sir, that abandoned car murder. Oh, no, I shouldn't go so far as to say it's exactly stumped us, but there's something we've been keeping under cover. Some Egyptian hieroglyphics, sir, and it just occurred to me you'd be the very man to take a look at 'em. What say?—You'll be glad to hear about it? Oh, all right, I thought maybe you'd be interested in it. I'll run right out now, if you don't mind. Thank you sir."

"Thought that would fetch 'em," the officer grinned to himself. "Glad I thought about him at that."

The lieutenant had good reason to respect the prowess of old Josiah Simms, as the latter had on more than one occasion allowed his interest in criminal matters to call him from the seclusion of his voluntary retirement, usually to the discomfiture of some luckless offender. Mr. Simms in his day had been the leading criminal-lawyer of Detroit, and it was only at sixty that the keen little old man had wiggled out of harness, the better to enjoy the remainder of his youth, as he aptly expressed it.

But a few weeks before he had been instrumental in solving a mystery that had become well nigh hopeless for the department. His deep interest in Egyptology had been responsible for his break in his usual habits, and in the present case the lieutenant scented a similar incentive.

With the victim's cap in his pocket, therefore, the officer hastened to the attractive home of Mr. Simms on Burlingame Avenue, where he found the little old man in his library, surrounded by a profusion of books and pictures that greatly impressed the police visitor. Having been announced by the maid, the lieutenant was invited to a comfortable seat by the retired lawyer, who polished his large old-fashioned steel-rimmed glasses vigorously with the tail of his long alpaca coat, fussily hunted for a box of long stogies, and at last addressed his guest with ill-concealed impatience.

"Well, well," he exclaimed. "Out with

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it. No policeman ever comes to see me without being in trouble. Don't waste time in palaver, but get to the point. What's this bluff about those hieroglyphics, now?"

"It ain't no bluff at all, Mr. Simms," meekly replied the police officer. "I'll give it to you straight—this case has got my goat, and the last thing to show up put me in mind of you. I don't need to tell you much, since you've read the story in the morning paper. This here cap we overlooked somehow, when we examined the body, and it just showed up, hid in the hood of the big ulster he wore when we found 'im. If you can make heads or tails of it, I wish you'd wise me up. It's worse than Greek to me."

As the little old man held out his hand for the cap the officer rapidly covered the ground of the day's developments since the appearance of the morning paper, all of which seemed to interest the attentive Mr. Simms mightily. As he scanned the figures on the piece of white linen, he wrinkled his nose and grinned quizzically at the lieutenant.

"Ain't but one man in town who could have written this," he chuckled. "And what's more he's signed his name as plain as paint, too, if you know anything about hieroglyphics and connect that with the message he has evidently left behind. Maybe it's carrying coals to Newcastle, but I'll suggest just this: there weren't any vowels in the Egyptian alphabet."

"Now lookit here, Mr. Simms," the harried official complained. "I've admitted the corn, and put it to you straight. You can kid me, and I know it, but what I want is the key to this —— riddle, so be a good sport and give me a hand."

"Oh, all right," sighed Mr. Simms. "I feared I might be shooting over your head. I'll work out the translation of this for you later in words of one syllable. In the meantime I'd like to take a look at your victim. I have a sneaking suspicion I may know the gentleman, but it's best to make sure."

The little old man called querulously for his maid, Ellen, who promptly brought a pair of congress gaiters, for which Mr. Simms exchanged his comfortable carpet slippers grumblingly. She then assisted him to squirm into a pair of large-buckled golashes, held his tight-fitting short overcoat, produced his brown wool mittens and ushered the two to the door.

As the little old man skurried down the walk to the waiting police car in the keen wind the long tails of his flapping alpaca coat fluttered ludicrously beneath his short top-coat, but to the lieutenant the appearance of his welcome ally caused no such feeling of mirth as might have been felt by a chance passer-by.

To the lieutenant there had come a persistent feeling that his work was over. On no other basis could he reconcile the statement of Mr. Simms that he more than suspected the identity of the mysterious victim, and knew without doubt the writer of a message from the possible criminal.

IT WAS therefore with no sense of surprise that he heard Mr. Simms mutter as the two stood before the contorted body in the morgue:

"Well, well. As I live, my old friend Colonel Ptolemy."

"Did you know him well, Mr. Simms?" the police officer queried solicitously, thinking to surprise the old man into a prompter explanation than it was his usual custom to offer a policeman.

"Alas, poor Yorick, I knew him well," replied the little old man, with the suspicion of a smile. "But how does it happen you haven't held an autopsy?"

"Couldn't," replied Balch earnestly. "He was out in all that ten-below-zero weather for almost twenty-four hours. Body frozen like a rock, and I told the doc to wait till it thawed out. He'd 've had to 've tried the job with a broad-ax. You can see for yourself he's froze through yet."

"Humph! Ah! Yes!" snorted Simms. "Just so! My grief won't allow me to gaze on this melancholy sight any longer. Got an errand to do anyhow. Wish you'd put that car at my disposal for about an hour. It'll be in the nature of official business, so it's all right. Go back and stay in your office, and if you want my advice, just act mysterious and don't say a single word to anybody, much less a reporter. I won't tell you a thing right now, but ease your mind, and call off all your investigators. Your job on this case is over, or I miss my guess."

Taking the acceptance of the lieutenant for granted the agile Mr. Simms jumped into the waiting machine and waved an anything but grief-stricken farewell to the astonished lieutenant, after which he directed the chauffeur to drive him as quickly

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as possible to a corner on Lafayette, near the viaduct.

Arriving at his destination Mr. Simms hurried into a large imposing building, over the door of which a handsome sign proclaimed:

FRANKLIN R. MOULTON
MANUFACTURING COMPANY
Caskets & Undertakers Supplies

To the young lady at the information desk Mr. Simms directed that she announce to Mr. Moulton that his old friend, Josiah Simms, wanted to see him on pressing business. It was scarcely half a minute before a huge bluff man, with a large bald head and bristling gray whiskers appeared to escort the visitor personally to his magnificent private office.

"It's been almost two months since I saw you last, Josiah," boomed the delighted Mr. Moulton. "I was just about to call you up, too. Picked up a fine pectoral necklace I want to show you. Think you'll agree with me it's a genuine Fourteenth Dynasty."

"You don't by any chance suspect the dire purpose of this visit, do you, Frank?" Mr. Simms inquired with mock solemnity. "I am here on a very serious mission. Tell me and tell me at once with no prevarication. *Why did you feel called on to shoot poor defenseless Colonel Ptolemy?*"

"What's that?" inquired Mr. Moulton. "I don't get you at all, Josiah. What's the idea?"

"Possibly this will refresh your perverted criminal memory, sir," declaimed Mr. Simms, casting the cap embelished with its hieroglyphic screed before the astonished manufacturer.

"Shades of Ammon Ra!" gasped the manufacturer. "But this is too good to be true! I forgot for the moment that you always called the old 'Doc' Colonel Ptolemy. I can not tell a lie. I did it with my trusty forty-five. Josiah, this is going to be the joke of the year!"

The ruddy Mr. Moulton gazed at his friend with a mirth-provoking grin, which rapidly changed to gurgles and snorts of keen delight. He slapped his huge thighs and grasping the reluctant hands of Mr. Simms danced the latter protestingly around the large flat-topped desk in the middle of the room, to the accompaniment of roars of laughter that almost shook the building.

"Calm yourself. Calm yourself," the exhausted little old man complained, as soon as he could regain his breath. "And let me in on this joke. Knowing your peculiar brand of humor, there's possibly a good laugh invisible to the naked eye, but suppose you explain."

"All right, I will," snorted the delighted manufacturer. "I'll have to go back a few months, but it won't take long. You may remember the furor kicked up in the newspapers about three months ago over the murder of that policeman on Grand River Avenue? The police arrested a hundred suspects, every one of whom they had to dismiss in less than a week.

"Well, four or five of us were having lunch at the club with the police commissioner about that time, and I claimed his detective department was a bunch of dubs. He got sore as a goat, and claimed nobody could be expected to land a criminal unless he had some clue to start on."

"I remember the patrolman's murder," commented the now patiently waiting Simms. "Shot down on a dark corner about midnight, with no possible clue as to the offender."

"Yep, that's the case," responded Moulton. "It was a tough one, of course, but during the preceding ninety days there had been thirty other murders in Detroit, and not a single criminal convicted for one of them. I claimed the more clues, the worse off his flat-foot bunch would be, and one word led to another till we both got pretty hot under the collar. It wound up by my offering to bet him a thousand dollars I could make monkeys of his whole force. He took me up and we reduced our wager to a written gentleman's agreement. Wait, I'll show it to you."

The now interested Mr. Simms took the the paper handed to him by his friend and carefully scanned the document, which read as follows:

I, Franklin R. Moulton, hereby wager the sum of $1,000.00, subject to the signed acceptance of the following conditions by Orville S. Borden.

I agree to undertake a business venture, actually innocent, but obviously a serious crime. I agree that said venture shall certainly insure the activity of the Police Department of the City of Detroit.

I further agree to afford a positive clue to my direct complicity with the venture in question.

I agree to mention the terms and purposes of this agreement to only one person, said individual to be my assistant in consummating said venture. Orville S. Borden agrees to mention the terms and

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purposes of this agreement to absolutely no one. Both parties to this agreement shall be absolved from this pledge of secrecy only after one week's time from the consummation of this purposed venture, or upon a detection of its real nature, or of my identity in connection therewith, prior to the time limit above mentioned.

Should I fail to perform each and every one of the above stipulations I agree to pay to Orville S. Borden the sum of $1,000.00.

Having performed my agreements as above stated, Orville S. Borden agrees to pay me the sum of $1,000.00 should the Police Department fail to discover that the venture in question is not a crime, said discovery to be made by them within one week's time from the date said venture is consummated.

OR, Orville S. Borden agrees to pay me the sum of $1,000.00 should the Police Department fail to detect my direct complicity in consummating the venture in question.

I further agree to consider that the Police Department has actually succeeded on either of these aforementioned two counts, should a discovery of either be made by them through any outside help, not directly solicited by them.

In the event of the Police Department personally soliciting the expert service of any outsider I shall be given the privilege of guaranteeing in advance to insure that such personal solicitation shall be made to one, and only one, certain individual. In the event that said certain individual is sought out for special and expert advice I am to be paid an additional sum of $500.00 by Orville S. Borden. The name of said individual is written by me and sealed in two envelopes, one of which shall accompany each copy of this agreement in duplicate herewith.

In the event of the Police Department being forced to solicit the expert advice of the individual whose name is thus written and concealed I agree that said individual shall discover the nature of the proposed practical joke to be perpetrated by me, as well as discover my direct complicity therewith, and perfect both ends within a period of time not to exceed twelve hours from the time he is personally approached by any member of the Police Department in relation to this venture.

(Signed) FRANKLIN R. MOULTON.
(Accepted) ORVILLE S. BORDEN.
Dated at Detroit, County of Wayne, State of Michigan, this twelfth day of September, the year of our Lord, nineteen hundred and sixteen.

"I'll certainly have to split that extra five hundred with you Josiah," grinned Moulton as his friend finished reading with a hearty laugh. "I'm now released from my agreement of secrecy, and don't mind telling you it is your name written within the two envelopes."

"Well enough," retorted Mr. Simms. "Know exactly where I can use the money, but before I spend it you'll have to show me where you've earned it. I can see that you have fulfilled everything but one clause. I can't see any hint of a business venture in this joke at any stage of the game, however."

"You don't?" demanded Moulton. "I'm ashamed of you, Josiah! There's a convention of the undertakers of the country at Atlantic City on the 22nd of the month. If I tried to sell them a coffin-nail through a regular advertisement they'd boycott me quicker than they did the Universal Casket Co., when the latter tried an advertising campaign to make the undertakers of the country actually rich."

"Well?" inquired the still mystified Mr. Simms.

"Well!" retorted the manufacturer. "This case has been given not less than one-hundred and fifty pages of free publicity all over the country. When we do go down there next week we'll come back with forty thousand dollars worth of orders for 'Ptolomaic Embalming Fluid' that in the natural course of events would have been divided among sixteen competitors. The undertakers of the country are about the biggest boobs on earth, but they are only human. Any preparation that can fool a Police Department as the old 'Doc' fooled 'em, sells itself. Do you know the exact age of old 'Doc,' Josiah?"

"Well not exactly," responded Mr. Simms with a glimmer of advertising comprehension. "But I remember he sat in your outer office for a good many years before you shipped him to your Chicago branch about ten years ago."

"He's ninety-five years old," boasted Moulton. "He died in 1872, and was fifty years old when he kicked in."

"You win, I guess," replied Mr. Simms admiringly. "You beat even us lawyers in getting the free publicity. But what about the red-headed humpback?"

"Wasn't any," explained Moulton. "I fixed up one of our men with a red wig and a wad of coffin-stuffing in the back of his overcoat. Told him to be as conspicuous as possible until he boarded that train. He stepped into the vestibule between two cars, jerked off his wig, slipped out of his overcoat, and got off with it over his arm at Windsor. I bought that old Ford in Ypsilanti for one hundred and twenty-five dollars and took off the license tags. Planted the other exhibits and wrote that big check myself to arouse newspaper curiosity.

"About the only chance I took was making that extra five hundred dollars, but figured you were the only man in town they would think of going to for a translation of

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Egyptian hieroglyphics. I guessed right about that, though they needn't have called on you for help at all, if they'd been keen enough to rip off that bit of linen."

"Thanks for the tip," laughed the little old man. "Well, I have to return an automobile. See you later about that Fourteenth Dynasty necklace."

THE lieutenant was impatiently awaiting the return of Mr. Simms, and was afforded sufficient information by the latter to cause the cold sweat to stand in small beads all over the police official's rough red forehead.

"Good Lord, Mr. Simms," he at last expostulated. "This means I gotta take a vacation, pronto. But say, you must be kidding me. Nobody but the Egyptians ever knew how to embalm a body like that, did they now?"

"My dear Lieutenant," lectured the little old man patiently. "The Egyptians are a back number. A body may be embalmed nowadays to last forever. If you are willing to pay enough it may be literally turned into a statue as fresh and natural as life. Properly cared for it would last till the crack of doom. Old 'Colonel Ptolemy' sat in Mr. Moulton's two offices for over forty years.

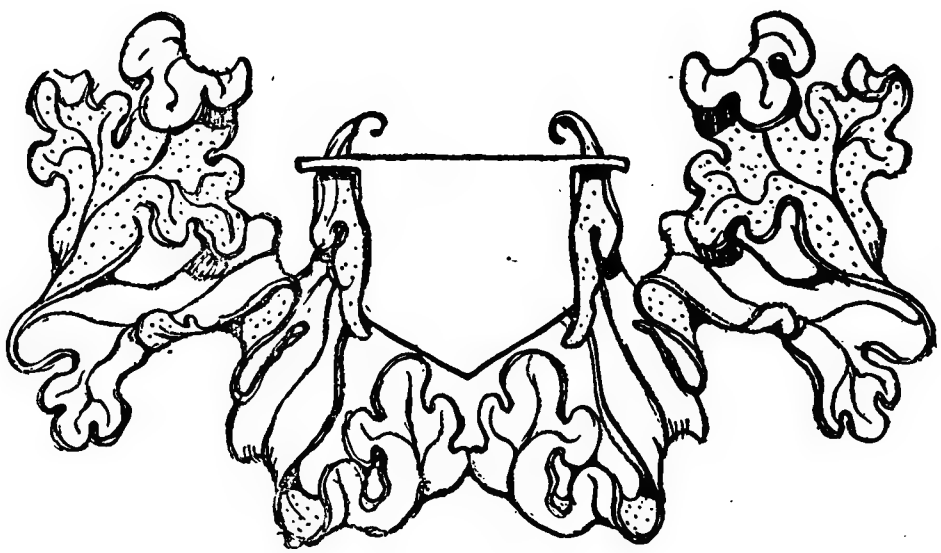
"They touched him up for color every six months or so, and put a fresh paper in his lap every morning. New customers used to be introduced to him by a ventriloquist wag of a clerk, and conversations sometimes ensued for fifteen minutes between them. He fooled a governor of Illinois once, so you may have that consolation."

"I see my finish all right," sighed the bewildered lieutenant, "but what in the devil did that sign on his cap say? The commish' certainly couldn't expect me to read that."

"Well, not exactly as you saw it," dryly responded Mr. Simms, "but I've ripped it off and you can read the translation on the other side. Here it is."

With a look of pathetic resignation the lieutenant accepted the piece of white cloth, which disclosed on its reverse side this exact translation of the cryptic message:

I give to thee this dead person as our bet.
Yours forever, MOULTON.



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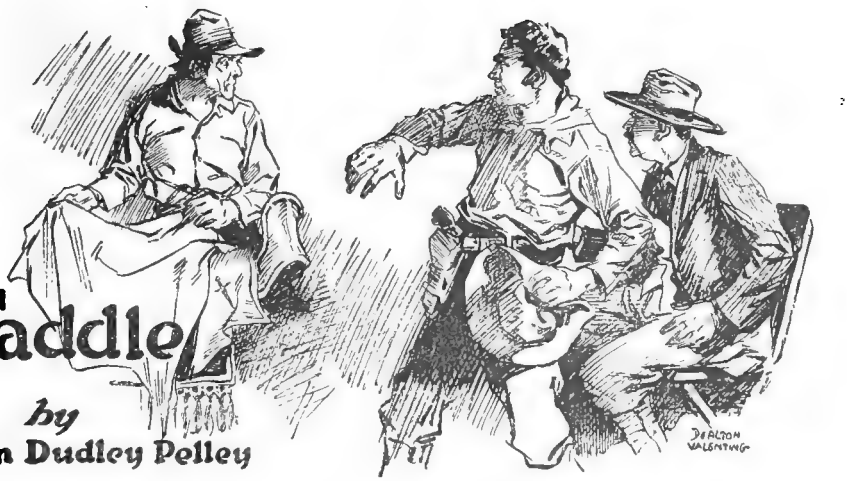

The Saddle

by

William Dudley Pelley

Author of "The World Next Door," "A Case at Law," etc.

"SQUARE DEAL" MACLEOD, arena-boss in the "Carstock Wild West," sent me to the huge trunk in the horse-tent. He desired one of the brilliant neckerchiefs for which he was famous. I could not find the scarf. But the errand gave me the opportunity cherished through several seasons, to solve the mystery in the unusual size of the old showman's solitary baggage.

This thing I discovered: The trunk was partitioned in the center. One-half contained Mac's clothing and personal arena accouterments. When I had stealthily removed the white sheeting covering an awkward object alone in the other compartment, I discovered that Square Deal Mac was being accompanied in his travels by a high Oriental saddle of matchless beauty.

I recognized its Arabian manufacture. But the leather, its origin, how Mac came by it, why he toted it about with him yet never used it, instead of leaving it at his home in the Catskills with countless other relics of his arena experiences, was annoying mystery.

I had no patience with mysteries. For season after season I had fretted MacLeod—demanding why he forever carried a trunk of such abnormal proportion. Always he had laughed and managed to avoid an explanation. Now my discovery made the mystery deeper.

First, the saddle's color was pure milk-white. Its texture was flawless—softer than the finest, costliest chamois. Never had I supposed such efficiency in the art of treating leather possible as could evolve such an exquisite product.

Secondly, no blemish appeared on its velvet surfaces to indicate that it had ever been cinched on a horse or borne a rider behind its horn. I was astounded at my discovery. But the light under the horse-top was poor and my time was short. I replaced the sheeting with but a cursory examination.

Then I faced old Mac with my knowledge. His bronzed face flushed. He did not wish to talk about it. But I was insistent. Besides, I got him through a knowledge of a weakness which he had. I rolled him sweet cigarets. And so long as the cigarets kept coming, the tale progressed.

II

"I CARRY that there saddle, sonny," said he, "as a gentle reminder to keep my self-control regardless o' the riotousness o' the circumstances.

"Maybe it ain't exactly a yarn such as you'd spring at the Epworth League strawberry festival or unravel as introductory pleasantry when the South Sea missionary speaks before the Old Ladies' Home. But it's the tale o' the full measure o' a manly man and in tryin' to pattern after him, that piece o' horse-furniture sure has helped.

"There's been times in this business, sonny, when human things in pants have got my nanny so properly that it seemed I'd explode if I couldn't sail in and commit misunderstandin' and wreckage on their

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persons. I've seen occasions when the fondest desire o' my existence was to dig out my six-gun, find the party who provoked the profanity and give him a vision o' the Promised Land, a shell at a time.

"But if I have not given way, if I am not known as a gentleman given to sudden anger, thoughtlessness or murder in his moods, the sight o' that saddle is responsible. For if I should so far forget myself as to go to my trunk for my private arsenal, I find it packed away under that saddle. I look at the saddle and thinks what a bloomin' fool I am to believe that killin' is curin'. I leave the gun be where it is. I goes to my goat-getter and satisfies myself with either handin' him an increase o' salary or kickin' his shins.

"Therefore, I have never contributed to the wearin' out o' no penitentiary and found in the bargain that the man who keeps his head and his temper is the man that wins. He's a superman. He's a whole head taller than the rest o' his race and he's loved o' the gods. I know. I saw Trenor Mackenzie do it. It's the story o' that fearful saddle.

"I was young at the Wild West business when I first met Trenor Mackenzie; just off the ranch. I come from one o' them localities where the measure o' a man was eatin' the fried heart o' a neighbor each mornin' for breakfast. I thought that to be all male and a yard wide, it was necessary to separate into his constituent elements every chap that happened to spit on your shoes. To gun a man was credential for a mustache; to plant your fist in a chap's vitals so securely that it had to be pried out with a monkey-wrench signified your eligibility for the vote.

"Even when I signed with old Colonel Carrody I was flighty in my sentiments and given to walkin' the earth with entrances to twin tunnels stuck in my belt in shape o' six-guns and imaginin' how bold and bad I must look to the population east o' the Mississipp' because I had hair on my chest and shot out street lights on the smallest provocation. Then Trenor Mackenzie came along. He demonstrated that there ain't no fool like the young one who thinks he's bold and bad, exceptin' an old one.

"Trenor walked onto the lot one Sunday mornin' down in Oklahoma. He was dressed in all the scenery o' the Fall roundup on the Lazy Q. He was a handsome young giant in them days, a boy o' rawhide and iron with a jaw like a declaration o' martial law.

"'What's your specialty?' demanded the old colonel. 'What can you do?'

"'I can ride buckers,' says Trenor. 'My business is to get on top o' horseflesh and stay there.'

"The old colonel smiled sort o' quietly.

"'Even Silver King, you could ride, I suppose,' he says.

"'Do you want an exhibition?' said Trenor. 'Get a hackaway on him and loan me a saddle. All this bunch has got to do is watch,' he said.

"The old colonel really wanted a man to ride Silver King. The horse was the only wild stallion in captivity at the time. The Injuns had caught him after a five-hundred-mile relay through the deserts o' southern Idaho. They'd sold him to the old Colonel, who'd tried to find a male that could accustom himself to bein' shot through the air twice daily and landin' on his head.

"Half a dozen punchers was ordered to run Silver King from the box-car, therefore, and across to the arena. They put a burlap blinder on him and gave Trenor two helpers. Silver King fought like an Irishman bein' taken to a nut repository under the hallucination that he's Jess Willard.

"You could fairly see his hind legs vibrate where he concentrated on leavin' the territory behind him just plumb shattered into fragments. But his ears bein' barnacled with men, he was sort o' handicapped. A saddle was cinched on him and Trenor got aboard.

"What's more, Trenor Mackenzie stayed aboard. On the back o' the worst bucker the Wild-West show business ever knew Trenor Mackenzie stayed aboard. He went up and down so fast that frequently on the way down he met himself comin' up. But that horse couldn't get rid o' him any more than he could get rid o' his reputation.

"Trenor was hired. Twice daily he stuck to that wicked animal until the shrill treble o' the whistle.

"Bein' in the business, sonny, you know there's always a guy handy on a horse durin' a buckin' contest who's supposed to dash up side o' the plungin' beast and grab the bridle. That's so the rider can dismount as nature intended a man to alight from a horse. When Trenor Mackenzie ridin' Silver King had been added to the program, the old colonel give me a job as that attendant.

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"That was how I came to know the Scotchman real well. In fact we got to be fast friends—real confidential as two girls in a boarding-school. He was supposed to stick in the saddle three minutes. Then it was me that rode up to that thousand-pound chunk o' plungin' wildcat and let Trenor contact his feet with the ground in such a manner as didn't dislocate him anywhere nor dent up the surface o' the world.

"WE'D been playin' up through Illinois and into northern Michigan when one afternoon the unexpected happened. I rode up to save Trenor's life as usual. That crazy stallion gave a sudden plunge, turned sideways, made another and stove straight ahead. Silver King wasn't makin' allowance for neighbors bein' in the vicinity.

"Before I could wheel Jenny out o' his way, he'd struck us broadside. Both horses lost their footin'. With sickenin' shrieks from the female part o' the grand-stand, Trenor and Silver King and me and Jenny all went down in a death-heap, hid by a cloud o' dust.

"I have had frequent reoccurrences o' them three minutes many times since in my sleep. It's considerable sensation to have your off leg under ten hundred pounds o' kickin' horse-meat and another horse and man strugglin' on top o' you both while you wait for a lightin' hoof-whip to knock all the joy and daylight from your existence.

"When it was all over, Silver King went jumpin' down the lot, tryin' to shake the empty saddle. Jenny got to her wiry legs with a terrific black-and-blue spot on her back that some one recognized as me. But on the ground, nude from the belt up—his shirt bein' stripped off in the mêlée—was Trenor Mackenzie lyin' ghastly quiet.

"We picked him up by the arms and legs and bore him off like a Roman gladiator. If he hadn't been made out o' the blood and steel, he'd been killed. But it was only a knockout. Within five minutes he was sittin' up; within ten he was in a new shirt; within fifteen he was back in the arena for more.

"The men in the bleachers was cheerin' like the ninth o' a ball-game with the score tied and all bases full; the women was soppin' their eyes like they was at a weddin' or funeral or somethin'. Silver King was caught and made to load his pack again. That son-of-a-gun Mackenzie got on him and this time he stayed on him—until the whistle blew. He was that kind o' cuss. There warn't no fear in him.

"But the incident o' rippin' off his shirt had disclosed something that natcherly made me ask questions. On the flesh over his heart a big green dagger had been tattooed in dirty ink.

"I made bold to ask Trenor about it that evenin'. I felt that the closeness o' our friendship and accommodatin' him twice daily in the matter o' comin' to earth alive and possessin' his dignity, warranted me takin' liberties with his physique.

"He replied sort o' grim-like:

" 'MacLeod, if I didn't carry that tell-tale mark, I'd be a happier man.'

"It was exasperatin' to hear that much and wonder what that dirty green dagger had to do with his permanent happiness. I was rather indiscreet in my interrogatories. Said he:

" 'That dagger makes me a marked man for a chap that thinks he wants my life. There's been a girl. It was out on Snake River. She was the only white woman within hundreds o' miles and we was both after her,' says he. 'I won. But before I could marry her, this chap finds out in some way that her father has killed a man. It was the old story o' compellin' the girl to marry him or the old man swing. The girl was a good girl. She married the cuss; within a year she died of a broken heart.

" 'Before she cashed in, I got word that she wanted to see me. I arrived, but I had to plant my fist in the chap's face like the butt-end o' a young tree before he'd consent to me visitin' with her. When that failed, I tried my gun-butt. I made a miscalculation on his skull; the butt sliced a glancin' blow across his face, spoiled an eye and ripped a gash he carries to the present. I left him considerably messed up and sprawled before the door.

" 'There was a sobby time ensued inside, but before she snuffed out she made me promise that regardless o' the provocation, I wouldn't kill the cuss. I promised because for some woman's reason she couldn't die happy without it. We buried the reason in the hollow o' her arm in the same casket with her three days later,' he says. 'When the father had recovered and discovered how I'd drawn pictures on his map for life, the first idea poppin' into his

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misshapen bean was to hold me responsible for everything.

" 'He turns all his available assets into cash and devotes his life to houndin' me day and night, the purpose bein' to find me in such circumstances that he can kill me without the chance o' bein' caught and hung. He put a bullet into my shoulder in San Antonio. He splintered my arm with another in Cincinnati. He landed a knife-thrust in a Chicago saloon and did time for hittin' the wrong guy in Springfield, Mass.

" 'I've no doubt he'll locate me with this show after a while. Then he'll sneak around till he can pot me in the back or in bed or any dum kind o' place where he can pull the trigger and his freight and read the newspapers o' some distant city to learn if he got me.'

" 'But why do you stand for it?' says I. 'You can have him jailed for this sort o' thing. Or you could turn and have it out with him in a face-to-face gun-fight.'

"Mackenzie drew himself up kind o' proud. He says:

" 'You see these hands, son? I could take Wild Dirkell in them and break his back. If I couldn't get hold o' him I could draw a gun three seconds quicker and I could shoot to kill. But there's the problem. I been wrestlin' it out with myself. Here's my conclusions: I ain't afraid o' Wild Dirkell; I could walk up into the face o' his armaments and dare him to gun me, laughin' while I did it. But the instant I draw on him, I've doped it out I ain't a dum bit better than Dirkell himself.

" 'I'm explainin' it like this: There ain't a man with this outfit,' he says, 'that'd get out a gun, a knife or his fists and descend on a small boy to take out revenge on him—he'd be the dumdest coward that ever drawed breath. There ain't a man here that'd strike a woman—he'd be the smallest specimen o' manhood that ever supported his weight with legs. Nor do I believe there's a feller here that'd tote a gun or a knife and go after an idiot, thinkin' it was anything glorious to investigate his innards with frightfulness and dig out his tripe.

" 'So when you come right down to it, the only measure o' a man is when his opponent is worthy o' his attention by bein' equally as good as he or a trifle better. I've figgered that a man is only brave in the ratio that his antagonist is bigger, mightier and deadlier than himself. In the same way you're a coward, a gutter-snipe, a boy-killer, a woman-beater and an idiot-butcher when you descend to fuse in pandemonium with one that's weaker than you in his brains, his muscles or his armaments.

" 'Here's this low-down, small-bored, uneducated tag-end o' disfigured humanity,' he says, 'huntin' to shoot me in the back under circumstances that'd escape responsibility. There's no glory spillin' him out on the ground; I could do it easy. But the first blow I struck would be a coward's blow. And I'm no coward!—regardless o' whether my attitude in refusin' to fight him, looks it.

" 'He may get me,' says Trenor. 'But I can die with a clean bill o' Christianity and manliness. That's more'n I could do if I showed the yeller streak to myself and took my private temper out on such a miserable bit o' species as this Wild Dirkell.'

"I DIDN'T know whether to call Trenor Mackenzie a great man or a bloomin' fool. I said:

" 'I never saw anything cowardly shootin' a rattler or steppin' on a spider.'

" 'Likenin' humans to the race o' reptiles and treatin' 'em accordin',' says he in answer, 'is a favorite excuse for a certain class o' moral lowbrows goin' to and fro in the earth raisin' such revengeful hell as they please. This chap ain't no rattler and he ain't no spider. He's a human being. He's made same as I am and knows right from wrong same as I do. He's just weaker'n I am because he can't control himself.

" 'But,' he goes on, 'that ain't sayin' that I don't live in hopes o' release from his persecution. I believe,' says he, 'there's some sort o' influence at work in this addled world, that takes care o' this brand o' situation. It's a tough old universe and it strikes some harsh balances. But it's founded on law, order and the rightness o' right. In the last analysis, crime is only disorder and the man that causes disorder in a world o' law and order, sooner or later has to give up or get out.

" 'Now then,' says he, 'if I descend to Dirkell's level and fight this misunderstandin' out with superior marksmanship, instead o' one party bein' out o' order there's two; there's twice as much disorder. I've figgered that the quickest way for right to prevail on the surface o' the world is for

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each human lookin' after his particular section o' it, meanin' himself. I'm believin' there's retribution waitin' somewhere for the chap that persists in hecklin' them individuals as is tryin' to keep their section o' the universe in order.

" 'So I'm believin',' he concludes, 'that if I look after my own behavior and don't contaminate myself with the limited reasonin' o' this enemy o' mine, somethin's goin' to take care o' him in his own good time and way.

" 'O' course I'm not sayin' I shouldn't take reasonable precautions and watch for the opportunity to sidetrack him if I can do it without bloodshed o' disturbin' the peace o' the universe. I'm lookin' on it that the Almighty provides opportunities for doin' everything in this life but it's ourselves that's responsible for choosin' them.

" 'So I'll simply hold this bloodthirsty chap at arm's length tolerantly and with amusement,' says he, 'and watch for the opportunity to give him a gentle shove up a spur-track on the journey o' life in a manner that'll permit me to look myself in the mirror without my gaze fallin', knowin' there's a fresh notch on my gun representin' only a poor half-brained chap with crime-distorted, uncontrollable, low-browed will.'

" 'You could disguise yourself or somethin',' says I. 'You could print a fake death-notice in the paper—there's a thousand things you could do to shake him off.'

" 'There lies the fatality o' this tattoo,' says Mackenzie. 'Dirkell knows my mark. I tried such a stunt once, out in Wyomin'. This crazy creature goes and digs up a corpse. He looks at its chest to prove to himself whether it's me that's dead. It ain't a pretty story so I've cut the details. But it shows you why I'm up against it. He won't quit till one o' us is dead. And if it's me, he'll only feel satisfied in his sentiments when he's reviewed the illustrations on my remains.'

"If it'd been a man with shifty eyes or an apologetic cough who'd said all this, I'd put it down as the excuses o' a bloomin' coward. But when somethin' that reminded you o' the expanse o' a Western cañon or the business edge o' a six-inch huntin' knife said it, it gave you food for thought.

"There was somethin' in Trenor Mackenzie's attitude that raised him where he seemed to be lookin' down several feet on us ordinary humans—who flies into passion and profanity, gun-wounds and headstones at the slur o' an eyelid or unpopular word. He was a great big precipice o' a man; he'd taken that stand o' his own volition; knew why he was takin' it and had the courage to live up to his convictions.

"His calm, clear, cool mental attitude was refreshin'. It made him sort o' superman. I commenced to wonder what in Tophet I'd seen manly in the species given to droopin' mustachios, sickenin' oaths and heart-stoppin' situations.

"You know we've endowed our Creator with all the human attributes exceptin' a sense o' humor. After gettin' a rope on the depth, poise and reserve o' Trenor Mackenzie's character, after separatin' the cheap bravado o' tin-horn bandits with the fearlessness o' Trenor Mackenzie—Gentleman Unafraid—I commenced to wonder if the good God didn't laugh sometimes at the strut o' the bad men so-called, that ordinary panted humanity flees behind bars and barrels and outhouses from, in terror.

"And I commenced to observe how boyish I was, stickin' my guns in my pants at such a rakish angle. I toned down my dress a little. I began to think twice before rippin' out any old piece o' insultin' talk. And unconsciously I held my head a little higher and thought a little better o' myself. I tell you, Trenor Mackenzie's sort o' bravery and manliness was catching. I'm dummed, too, if it didn't begin to give me a heap o' self-satisfaction.

"All the same, I wondered how his ethics o' right and wrong was goin' to end—with a murderer on his trail. Always after that one talk, he only smiled when I mentioned the nonappearance o' Wild Dirkell.

" 'We won't bother trouble, son,' says he. 'If I lose my life after livin' and believin' such scruples, I'll be the most surprised man in the world. And if I'm killed, I won't be alive to be surprised. So why worry? Meantime I'm gettin' twice as much out o' life as some chaps who burn themselves up with hate and temper and who finally find their gun-point travelin' round in circles at a really crucial minute.

" 'The feelin' o' absolute self-control—self-mastery—is the greatest sensation that can ever visit the soul o' mortal man, son,' says he. 'And the man who cultivates it has a clear head and hand for directin' situations to his benefit that are flatly fuddled and denied him when he's perpetually

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allowed his brain and body and temperament to run away with himself.'

III

"WE WERE playin' one o' the rube towns in Jersey before goin' into Winter quarters up the State.

"I was crossin' the empty arena one day before the afternoon performance when in the entrance I saw a stranger.

"I paid him particular attention principally because he was a Human Nightmare and he wasn't hangin' about simply to see the show.

"In age he might o' been thirty or he might o' been sixty. In dress he had most o' the equipment o' a chap just out o' the Nevada sagebrush toned down to get past the traffic cops o' the horrified East. But it wasn't the age or the out-o'-place dress which warranted my closer observation. It was his hair and his face.

"He had long hair like a woman—greasy sickly hair, streaked with gray, parted at the back and brought down in resemblance o' braids that were fastened in front o' each shoulder. His sombrero was pulled forward over a single eye o' yellowish-green. A blow across the opposite cheek had mashed out the other and the one weird eye shown baleful. I thought first he was grinnin' at me. Then I saw it was the way the scar kept the left-hand side of his mouth perpetually lifted to disclose the dirty yellow stumps o' teeth behind.

"The show was always bein' visited by freak characters from the four corners o' the West who wanted jobs on the strength o' some stunt they could do. I surmised the stranger wanted the old colonel and I directed him before some fool canvas-man ordered him off the lot and started somethin'. But the Nightmare didn't want Carrody. He looked me over till I shuddered. Then he said:

" 'I'm lookin' for a Scotchman connected with this show who rides wild horses.'

"In the bat o' an eyelash I placed him.

" 'You're in the wrong outfit,' I said, aimin' to give Trenor warnin'.

" 'You lie!' he gnashes at me. 'I've traced him up from Oklahoma where he joined.' Then, seemin' suddenly angry with himself at somethin' he hadn't meant to divulge, the Nightmare turns and pads off out o' sight. I found Trenor.

" 'Your Nemesis is here!' I said to him. 'I found him in the front——'

" 'I know,' said the Scotchman, 'I saw him myself.' He was so unconcerned he riled me.

" 'What you goin' to do about it?' I demanded.

" 'Nothin'.'

" 'Stick around and get shot?'

" 'He won't tackle me in the daylight,' said Trenor. 'He lacks the courage. It's the nights and treacherous places I'll have to watch.'

"A few hours later I rushed up to Trenor again. This time calamity was stickin' out all over me.

" 'He's got a job with the show, Tren,' I cried. 'He's got two Injuns with him. They're goin' to pull some shootin' or lynchin' stunt in the arena.'

"Mackenzie smiled.

" 'He's made so many miscalculations,' he said, 'now the poor soul has brought helpers to see the job's done thoroughly and proper.'

" 'Are you goin' to let 'em travel with you in the same outfit and wake up some night with a knife between your shoulders?'

" 'My dear young feller,' says Mackenzie, 'why get excited over it? You see, it was through me that the old colonel booked 'em.'

" 'Through you!'

" 'Correct,' said he. 'When they're in the same outfit I know where they are and what they're doin'. It gives me a better chance to satiate this chap's desire for revenge. There warn't much opportunity to do it with him trapsin' round, comin' on me in unexpected places o' the continent.'

"I meditated on this. The only answer I could make was somewhat beside the point:

" 'Seems you're havin' a lot o' influence with the old Colonel lately. It was you was responsible for gettin' Darlin' Sommers and his pony-expresses with us last week.'

" 'Yes,' said he, glad to change the subject, 'I've convinced the old Colonel that the diminishin' receipts in this business ain't entirely on account o' movies and baseball. These shows are all too much alike; see one and you've seen 'em all. I've persuaded the old Colonel to let me scour round and book some acts different from the common run o' tricks pulled in a Wild-West show. Do you know what sort o' idee I pleased him with yesterday? I says: '"Why not combine with our Wild-West horsemanship, a similar exhibition o'

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the wild horsemanship o' the East? Why not smash precedent by addin' to the cowboys, cow-girls and Injuns, a good-sized troop o' horsemen from the other side the world—Arabs and Cossacks and all that line. It's never been done before in our business. Sure not! Then why not be first to do it? Match our Western American punchers against the skill o' the saddle-clingers o' the East—it'd be interestin' and a novelty.' The old Colonel was almost persuaded. He says—

" 'Some one will have to trip over to them countries and sign up such a crowd." And I volunteered to do it. I've a hunch he'll send me.'

" 'But this Wild Dirkell,' I said, returnin' to the more absorbin' subject.

" 'To blazes with him!' swore Mackenzie. 'Now that he's with us, he's the least o' my worries."

"It bein' the old colonel's custom the last few weeks o' the closin' season to try out the acts that was to sign with him the comin' year, Wild Dirkell and his Injuns pulled their proposed trick next afternoon.

"The two Sioux were supposed to be horse-thieves and light out with Dirkell's cayuse in the night. Dirkell was supposed to stalk 'em, capture 'em and swing 'em single-handed. There was somethin' about Wild Dirkell makin' himself out a hero that was bad and a lot o' shootin' in the act which was worse.

" 'Look here, Tren,' says I after I'd lamped it sufficiently, 'there's somethin' about this trick that I don't like. Barrin' the half-sided grin on that chap's mug, there's the shootin'. They spills altogether too much black powder for the size o' their trick. I would advise you as a friend and admirer, Tren, that you do not canter round the arena in your paid capacity as attendant when your buckin' act is over,' said I. 'Because I've a hunch—just a hunch—that if Dirkell thought o' loadin' with somethin' beside blanks, it'd be hard work to fix responsibility if one o' them exhibition bullets landed in your cosmos, accidentally on purpose,' said I.

" 'Fiddlesticks!' Trenor remarked.

"A FEW days before the final windin' up o' the show for the snow season, the three roughnecks was puttin' on their act as usual, havin' received an official O. K.

"Trenor entered the arena; cantered across on his calico cayuse. Dirkell took after his Injuns and the shootin' started. So much blue smoke was spilled that a rich fog hung in the mellow October sunshine.

"I wasn't notin' Trenor when the bullet struck. I only heard a cry. Turnin' about I saw him staggerin' at his pony's head.

"As I have before remarked, them was the days when I was wild and peppery—I usually shot first and did my arguin' afterward. This, despite the trainin' Mackenzie was soakin' me in. So I didn't rush to Trenor's aid, knowin' the rest would attend him. I looked for Dirkell. I spotted him standin' undecided and satisfactory-lookin' to one side. I clapped my leg round a horse and rode him down with all the deadliness o' a tax bill.

"He saw me comin'. Must o' been that somethin' in my manner o' helpin' myself to the guns at my belt, startled him. His conscience busted. He leaped to his saddle and wheeled his horse.

"Talk o' bull-doggin' a steer! It warn't an ace to the stunt I did bull-doggin' that Wild Dirkell from his horse. There was two horses took suddenly with empty saddles, while Dirkell and me rolled over tryin' the game o' scratchin' out each other's eyes without either one losin'.

"It took me several minutes to get my knee so far into his respiration that it interfered with his becomin' an octogenarian. Then I denuded his gun-hand o' the .44, broke it and shoved the shells into my shirt pocket.

"I decided not to kill the cuss. Hangin' would be better after the terrorizin' o' a trial. So I got him by the scuff o' his carbuncle area and marched him to the horse-tent. He was cussin' till the air was all mixed up like a cubist protrait o' the sun's rays warmin' the solar system.

"Trenor was brought into the horse-tent for repairs. With all the harshness o' the universe in the matter o' the individual, the show went on.

"He'd been taken by a lead pill under one collar-bone. It warn't a fatal wound. But it was bloody. His back was an ugly botch where the thing had come out. But bein' that kind o' chap, Trenor Mackenzie sat there calmly smokin' a cigaret and directed the cleanin' and dressin' o' the catastrophe. When it was over, he smiled amusedly on

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Dirkell. He wanted to know why so much rope was hitched to Dirkell's personality and how he come in the center o' it along with the main post.

" 'We got evidence on him at last!' I cried to the Sctochman. 'Look at the empty shells, Tren. I took 'em from his gun. Here's four blanks with the edge-curl intact. Here's two others with the curl straightened by the lead when it left, beside bein' different make o' munitions. Won't they convince a jury?'

"Dirkell was putrid with hate. Mackenzie looked at him long and studiously. Then to me he said: 'Untie him, son.'

" 'What! With the goods on him like I got at last?' said I. 'Judas Priest! Man, man! Don't pass up a chance like this to jail him because o' a bit o' sentiment.'

" 'Jail him?' said Trenor. 'What good would that do? It's only postponin' trouble. No, son. You're mistaken.' Then he said so loud that Dirkell could hear him: " 'You see, son, this man's a friend o' mine. Why, only this mornin' he accepted an invite to go with me over the water.

" 'The old colonel commissioned me to make the trip and sign up a tribe o' them brown men like I told you a few mornin's since,' said he. 'It's Col. Carrody's Wild West and Far East we're to be hereafter.'

"When I'd obeyed instructions and Dirkell was loosed, I grew fierce and impolite to Mackenzie. He shut me off.

" 'I know my business, son,' said he. 'I'm takin' him for protection.'

" 'Protection!' said I.

" 'Sure,' said he, 'to keep tabs on Dirkell, where he is and what he's up to.'

" 'Tren,' said I, 'I ask you to please a friend: Stop bein' an idiot and swat this viper while the swattin's good. Think o' the opportunities o' this chap in Africa or Russia or wherever you're goin', to put you out o' the way without telltale evidence for lynchin' purposes o' your admirin' friends.'

"Trenor replied: 'Keep on your unionsuit, son! I know perfectly what I'm about to do. Your job is to climb in the grandstand and help watch.'

" 'You're goin' to Africa nursin' a moccasin-snake in your bosom, Tren,' said I. 'You're expected back at a certain time. Hear me! If you don't show up in the time specified, if I ever have cause to believe that it was this Dirkell that "got you," he's to answer to me and it won't be to no Our-Lesson - This - Sunday Thou - Shalt - Not Kill foolishness that he'll make excuses with his mouth, either.

" 'He'll get his, and he'll get it good. It won't be in his back nor between his shoulder-blades. It'll be square in his chest and I'll be perfectly willin' to see the newspaper reporters afterward.'

"Trenor arose, caught my wrist, twisted it and brought me to face his granite eye.

" 'You're a good boy, son,' said he, 'but you're young and hot-headed. You've much to learn. This is my funeral and it's me that's givin' orders about it. Are you listenin'?' I said I was.

" 'Good!' said he. 'Then get this straight. Don't you lay a finger on this Dirkell!' he commanded. 'Do you want me to whistle it or shall I buy a quarter's worth o' stove-pipe and write it thereon in chalk? My reason is this: I've been readin' up on them brown folks I'm to visit over there in them deserts—their ways, customs and manners. It has been my purpose to go amongst them with a full knowledge o' their etiquette, so I won't unwittin'ly spit behind their window-curtains or say their prayers with my boots on. You understand?

" 'And it's been while so inflatin' myself with education that I have discovered somethin' that will end this feud without either of us turnin' criminal. That then, is why Dirkell is goin'. So now you can see that if you should suddenly wade into this wild man even though it looked as if I was dead, and quiet your nerves by leavin' his boots around somewhere with him in 'em, dead, it'd not only put his blood on your head but —might make o' my nice little well-laid plan pure wreckage.

" 'That's all I can tell you now. The rest will come out in its own due time. I want your promise—faithfully, man-to-man and irrevocably—that you won't touch a hair o' Dirkell's greasy locks, evermore, amen!' said he. 'Then live up to your word like a man.'

"Ten days later I was at the wharf when the two o' them sailed. As I watched Dirkell's evil face over the steamer rail I thought it held a grin o' hellish exaltation.

"But then, it might o' been my overwrought imagination. I had a powerful wild and peppery one, long in them days.

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"'IT'S amusin',' Trenor wrote from Marseilles, 'to study this chap —his mentality, his conscience, his actions in this situation. He is the lowest order o' criminal. All he thinks of is to do the job and cover his track. There's times I see he can't make me out—whether I'm a coward, tryin' to make up with coals o' fire and let the past stay buried, or whether I've got somethin' deep and deadly to spring on him when we reach the other side.

" 'So he's puzzled. And bein' puzzled makes him uneasy. Natcherly, he gave me no trouble on the way across, never refers to our past or the accident in the arena. You'd think us a pair o' strangers except in business relations. But I agree with you that the reason lies in his anticipation that far across them deserts, in the forests, jungles or steppes, the chance is goin' to come which he wants with no one lookin' but the crows.

" 'So there's nothin' to fear from him so long as we're in sight o' some official in brass buttons. But he's got considerable surprise comin', kid. You wait and see. While you're waitin', don't forget the promise you made me o' keepin' hands off him.'

"That was the last letter I ever got from Trenor Mackenzie. The weeks passed. Frequently I ran down to the old colonel's headquarters to see if Carrody had heard.

" 'Not a word,' he always said. Finally came a mornin' when he added:

" 'I'm worried.'

" 'Over what, Colonel?' said I.

" 'Somethin's happened to them men,' said he. 'It's a treacherous country they've attempted. Some o' the brown chaps might not o' taken kindly to their proposition.'

"I couldn't hold in longer. I did what I should o' done at first. I told about the feud.

" 'I'm sorry,' said the old colonel finally, 'that I didn't know about this before. I'd begun to think much o' that chap Mackenzie. There was somethin' about him so deep and calm; he seemed a chap you could rely on; who'd never get excited and do fool things; a man's man who knew himself—his limitations, his hidden powers, their possibilities. If he succeeded over there, I was to make him one o' my right-hand men the comin' season,' said he. 'Yes, I'm powerful sorry.'

"I left the old colonel agreein' it was a piece o' foolishness for Mackenzie to think he could take such a low-browed chunk o' hell into the wilderness and get away with the business by treatin' it like a child.

"Christmas came and passed. No word from Trenor. The ice in the Hudson before my home broke up. The Catskill snows began to melt. You could smell Spring in the air—along with the show hibernater's longin' for the odor o' hot peanuts, sawdust, black powder smoke and horse-sweat.

"If all had gone well, Trenor was to be back by the middle o' March. Up to the evenin' o' March fourteenth not a blessed line had any o' us heard.

"During the next day—me bein' down in Jersey watchin' preparations for takin' the outfit toward the Southwest with steady April sunshine—the colonel says:

" 'I'm sorry, MacLeod. I guess our man has come to grief. But,' said he, '—— if I'll write off the money I furnished him on my profit and loss account without an investigation. If he's been killed and robbed or the money gone through no fault o' his, I'll be satisfied. But——'

" 'Stop right where you are, Colonel,' said I. 'Don't you utter one word o' Tren Mackenzie takin' your money and abscondin'; not in my hearin'!'

" 'Tut, tut, sonny,' said the old man, 'keep your temper. I'd trust your friend to the end o' the earth. I've proved it because I did it. One look into his clean-cut, open, powerful face would make any man bet his last cent on him. But since you've told me about Dirkell, I've been thinkin'. If that demon-faced chap has made away with Mackenzie and calmly skipped with my wad—well, I'm goin' to send some one to get him if he goes three times round the earth.'

" 'And that some one, Colonel,' said I, 'is goin' to be known among men as little ol' Billy MacLeod.'

" 'Wait till the twenty-fifth,' said Carrody. 'If there's no sign o' our men, you can start.'

"It was along about the twentieth when I got an abrupt telegram from Carrody to come at once.

"I found him in his tent with perplexed face, fingerin' a letter.

" 'I have this mornin' received a letter from a chap o' my acquaintance,' said he, 'who works in a New York steamship office. He writes me the cattle-boat *Memphis* will dock up on the Jersey side probably on the

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followin' Saturday. He says there's twenty-five head o' stock aboard consigned to me billed from some port on the Mediterranean. He adds that they're accompanied by the blackest crew o' cutthroats that ever got loose in the daylight from a combined night attack o' delirium tremens and acute indigestion.'

" 'Then Trenor hasn't been slaughtered!' I cried.

"Somethin' in the old colonel's eye handicapped my celebration.

" 'There's not a word from Mackenzie, son,' said he. 'Trenor isn't with 'em. I'm advised that the bunch is chaperoned by a crazy-lookin' kite with woman's hair and a sliced-up face.'

" 'Then Trenor has lost!' I cried.

" 'I'm afraid so, son,' said Carrody. 'It would explain his silence. Trenor had probably rounded up his foreigners when Dirkell got him. The evil-faced devil probably brought home the crowd himself expectin' a reward or somethin'. He'll undoubtedly have somethin' to say about Mackenzie dyin' o' sickness, accident or sunstroke. He couldn't send word on ahead to us because I understand the man can't write.'

"There was shrieks o' silence betwixt us for a time.

" 'The haitch o' it is,' the colonel said finally, 'we can't disprove his story. Mackenzie really might o' perished o' sudden accident, fever or sunstroke.'

" 'A big iron hulk o' a man like him!' I roared. 'A man that could live through two crazy horses rollin' on him; who could watch the cleanin' and dressin' o' such a ghastly wound as Dirkell gave him—such a man perish from the acts o' Nature while this measly-faced, sickly little runt come through unscathed? Are you crazy? Tommyrot!' said I. And I commenced discussin' it with the Deity.

" 'The devil protects his own,' commented the old colonel. 'Anyhow, we'll see what account the Dirkell chap gives.'

"THREE days later Dirkell arrived. "He brought his crew horseback across the state o' Jersey. The brown men wouldn't trust themselves to the steam-cars. So they followed the carriage roads with Wild Dirkell at their head, scarin' the inhabitants into fits.

"I was in my tent, sweatin' blood at the fight I was makin' to keep my promise to Trenor if Dirkell should report my friend was dead. The old colonel sent for me; I went to his office and found the evil-faced chap there with all his desert pick-ups—only the chap in the New York steamship office had lacked language.

"One look into the old colonel's face and I realized the worst.

"Dirkell was coughin' fearfully. He'd been blackened by the sun and weather. Successions o' fever had burned into his marrow. He had shrunk and shriveled till his scar was frightful. And his one green eye—! It was somethin' to forget quickly. The man was unwell. It took a glance to show that his days on earth was numbered.

"I saw these things at a glance. But I saw somethin' else. On a camp-chair at his hand, Dirkell had set a tall grotesque object covered by a white sheet. He hugged it like a miser would hug his gold.

" 'Son,' said the old colonel, 'Dirkell reports that Mackenzie—is—dead!'

" 'Yes, I know,' I said hoarsely. 'But how did he come to die? By those hands?' And I whirled on Dirkell and wanted to howl for the remorse at givin' my promise.

"There was a crafty smile in the one green eye. The side o' the face came up a trifle higher, showin' the dirty yellow stumps o' teeth behind. It was the creature's way o' smilin'.

" 'You needn't look at me thataway,' said Dirkell. 'I didn't do it!'

" 'You expect me to believe that?' I snarled.

" 'Ask these fellers here,' said he, indicatin' the pirates he'd brought from the sand-heaps.

" 'Go on,' I said. 'Tell your story. And don't make it too strong. I might forget the promise Trenor made me give him.'

" 'From Marseilles we went across to Alexandria. We journeyed southward; joined a caravan,' said he, 'and pushed across the desert. We spent two months in the desert. Oh we found Arabs enough! Real polite fellers, they was; they took it as honor that Mackenzie and me should visit 'em.

" 'Mackenzie finally made 'em understand what he wanted. But the only bunch we could bring out was a family that was bein' slowly hacked to pieces by a neighborin' tribe till they was like to be wiped off the earth. There was only a couple o' dozen o' them. But they was

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good horsemen and willin' to hit the trail out o' the country to stay alive.

" 'Mackenzie took it his business was done and after a week's parley and fixin' o' pay and details, we got under way westward to the coast. They was afraid to recross the sand by the regular routes. They was keepin' a sharp lookout for this other hoard o' savages who wanted to wipe 'em out clean.

" 'We thought we was goin' to get away with it. But we wasn't. In the night they came. There was a terribul fight. We was all hacked to pieces and scattered in fifty ways for our lives. When we had collected in the mornin',' said he, 'Mackenzie was not among us!'

" 'Are you sure,' said I, 'that in that fight a bullet from your own gun didn't do the work you're askin' us to believe must be credited to them barbarians?'

"For a minute it looked like a fight after all. But the old colonel got round the table and dug his steel fingers in my shoulders. I was wild and peppery in them days as I said before, despite the trainin' in which Trenor'd been soakin' me.

"Dirkell was persuaded to continue after a time:

" 'We all got together—this bunch here—and talked the thing over. We concluded it wouldn't be right to let Mackenzie be carried off alive as prisoner, if there was a chance o' savin' him——'

" 'You mean,' said I, 'you wanted a look at that mark on his chest, to be sure the poor chap was croaked!'

" 'Son,' ordered the colonel, 'shut up! Dirkell, go on!'

" 'We all got together and started back after Mackenzie. We didn't hope to battle them sooperior numbers. But we did hope that by some trickery Mackenzie might be loosed if he was alive as a prisoner. It's frightful what them barbarians do to their prisoners o' war, sometimes.'

" 'You can cut the detail,' I broke in. 'Tell us in quick short words—did you find Mackenzie or did you not?'

" 'I did not!'

" 'Then how do you know that he's dead?'

" 'Weeks after, on our way to the coast, we run into a friendly tribe that'd visited with them as had attacked us. Among the things that was bartered, they reported, was a beautiful white saddle. They showed me this saddle. I bought it and brought it home with me!

" 'Some o' them barbarous tribes o' the desert,' went on Dirkell, 'have a pleasin' little custom o' flayin' their prisoners o' war and——'

"I gave a cry o' horror and went clean bughouse!

"Dirkell had lifted the sheet from the object in the chair and I saw the beautiful milk-white saddle.

"And on its side toward us, somewhat up near the horn, was the well-known tattoo I had seen the year before as Mackenzie lay deathly quiet in the arena with his shirt ripped off!

" 'Is this story true?' I heard the old colonel demand o' the big dignified interpreter that headed the bunch o' heathens.

"And the big interpreter nodded in confirmation.

"DIRKELL left our show for good that night. He took his trophy and went back to his home in the West.

"But the illness he'd undergone on his travels, the revenge that had burned him up, the end o' the quest that he'd swapped for his life, soon fixed him. He died the followin' year—and I made a special trip out there to purchase that saddle.

"I think they had a couple o' strong men sittin' on my chest till the one-eyed hellion could get his train out o' Jersey that night.

"When I was sane again, I said to the big interpreter:

" 'Great God!—what poor Tren must o' suffered.'

" 'Kid,' said the big interpreter, yankin' off his turban and his make-up, 'I've had the time o' my young life in this rig-out. That desert battle was an exhibition, arranged to show what the brown boys could do. As for that saddle o' the young deer pelt, say, I tattooed that dagger on the side o' it by a desert camp-fire with my own hands, just two months ago to-night!' "

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The Phoney Man

A Complete Novelette

by

Patrick and Terence Casey

Authors of "The Story of William Hyde," "According to His Caste," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE FRISCO KID MAKES A MISTAKE AND HAS HIS LOVE TESTED

IT WAS one of those long sleepy Summer afternoons when the cool of a bush or a tree is welcome, and not a thing stirs or makes a sound. The white road drowsed, drenched in sunlight, and the plucked and empty fields of the Mississippi Bottoms lay flat to either hand and very still.

Beside the white road, in the patch of shade of a cypress-tree, the Frisco Kid sprawled—a ragged, dusty little vagabond. At his feet, beyond the cypress patch of shade and altogether out in the sun-drenched road, the Gay-Cat was outstretched, sunning himself and dozing. They were lazying away, thus, the long soundless Summer afternoon.

A gang of heavy horseflies thrummed the air above the blissful dog. They disturbed his peace of mind. Out of the dust he lifted his yellow head and viciously he snapped at them. Yet did the flies continue to pester him. He turned up his round little belly and pawed at them. Also, quite desperately, he snapped again. But they gyrated out of reach and thrummed only louder and shriller. It was all no use.

He lay on his back, his paws and jaws motionless, his brown canine eyes closed to mere slits; and thus he eyed and studied the thrumming horseflies, the while he puzzled within his sharp yellow head just what next to do.

And then, as he lay there in that absurdly attentive posture, he heard the sound. It was a loud sound in all that sweet hush of drowsing white road and Summer afternoon sunshine and hot, empty, Mississippi Bottoms cotton-fields.

Tap, tap, tap—an unusual staccato sound. The dog scrambled afoot. Ragged ears cocked forward, he stood, in the middle of the road, watching the approaching man.

The man came tap-tapping on a stick along the road—a seedy, stoop-shouldered, shriveled-up man who wore large silver-rimmed glasses before his dim eyes. Once he paused and turned 'round to look back the way he had come and to listen, head on one side.

Then on again he moved, slowly tapping up the road toward the shady cypress-tree where the Kid watched and the Gay-Cat bristled. The Gay-Cat was within an ace of barking, when the Kid said:

"What yer excited about, Gay-Cat? It's only a old-timer stumpin' along on a stick. He's all dressed up like a jedge. He's a planter, mebbe, and most-like a mean and horstile one. Come here to me. He'll mash yer, Gay-Cat, with that stick he's a-carryin'. You come here to me, old hobo."

The approaching man was dressed in a suit of a somewhat precise cut. It was of an old-fashioned swallow-tailed effect. It had once been black; it was now green and shiny. The coat bulged and flared at the hips as though it concealed bundles, while beneath the swallow-tails behind, little torn

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tags of lining hung down like the ragged underfeathers of a bird.

He wore a shapeless black hat with brim turned up in front. His black hair draggled low on his forehead and was matted and oily with sweat. His face was brown as a walnut. It was wrinkled as a walnut, too—a lean, shrewd, quizzical bird-like face. And the large silver-rimmed glasses, outstanding, peering, increased that resemblance he bore to a bird. They gave him a somewhat malignant look, a somewhat predatory look —a look like that of a huge bird of prey.

The man did not go tap-tapping past the cypress-tree. Blind and groping he seemed, yet he became aware of the Frisco Kid's presence as by some mysterious sixth sense —certainly not by sight or sound. He drew, on the sudden, to a full stop.

Then, very deliberately, he faced toward the Kid and, standing stoop-shouldered and all hunched over to one side, he peered through his glasses into the shade of the cypress.

Presently, in an odd singsongy whine, he said:

"Evenin', neighbor, evenin' to yo'. The ole man cayn't see so elegan'-like, but he cayn listen right pert. He hearn yo' speakin' when he wuz down the road a piece. Shaw! he cayn hear yo' breathin' now, en yo' sittin' thar tight as a possum. 'Lowin' yo'd fetch the ole man a s'prise, yeah?

"Most all the folks tries to fool ole Jerry," he whined on, "but nobody up en down this heah river cayn do hit, skasely. Ole Jerry Mears, he's too spry en foxy, sho'. But hain't yo' wantin' a elegan' steel razor, sharp as fo'ty-rod whisky, er a dad-fetchin' pair o' spectacles, er a nickel-plated scissors fo' the missus, er the jim-crackiest whittlin' knife fo' love o' money?"

He edged closer, his bushy brows lifting questioningly over the tarnished tops of his glasses and his free left hand feeling toward his hip.

"Hain't yo' wantin' enny o' the things I'm totin', neighbor? A watch now, a elegan' gole watch, Massachusetts-made en warranted to keep time tell the river flows this far back, en gran' en gaudy to behold?

"I's got silver watches, nickel watches, en watches made out o' that gun-metal stuff with streaks in hit. En joolery—man alive, I's got bracelets, di'mond earrings—seventy-five cents them—en rings with garnets in 'em, big as rubies en so elegan' the Queen o' Sheba hernsef would be powerful proud to weah them—yeah, to weah them, as the Good Book says, on her lily-white han'."

"Hain't yo' jist feverishin' to see some o' the quality stuff I'm totin', neighbor?" he asked again, almost petulantly. "I's ben totin' these things a mighty long spell, neighbor, en skasely pedlin' enough to keep body en soul together.

"I'm a ole man, boss, though my hair hain't white as it oughter be, what with all the sorrer hit done seen en passed through. En I's toted my pack a consid'able ways this evenin' in the hot sun, neighbor, en showed my elegan' things fo' a passel o'—— darkies to paw over en 'Yah-hay!' about, en me not able to see more'n a foot at a time befo' my ——"

He stopped short. Edging wholly within the patch of shade, he peered over the tarnished tops of his spectacles with sudden suspicion.

"Dick," he said abruptly, "I's got gran' things fo' a colored man, elegan' things, jist the kind o' joolery en things a strappin' good-lookin' colored man like yo'-all wants to give yo' gal. I's traveled a powerful long ways jist fo' to show yo' em, Dick. Fo' they're cheap, Dick, cheaper'n——"

THE Frisco Kid leaped up. His usually pale face was an angry red, and there was in his deep-sunk eyes an expression of commingled resentment and scorn.

"A phoney man!" he cried. "Lookit him, Gay-Cat—a walkin', pedlin', buzzin' phoney man! And so blind, he don't know another hobo like hisself when he sees him! He's a-tryin' to shill off some phoney jul'ry on a blowed-in-the-glass stiff like the Frisco Kid! And worser'n that, old feller, he calls me 'Dick,' what ain't my moniker at all, but is a way a bo has when he spiels to a smoke!"

The blind man straightened out of his hunched-over, peering attitude. His face went darker than the brown of walnut. It was shocking, that vehement change which swept over him. Somehow he did not seem so old nor so decrepit as the pedler with the stoop and whine.

"Yo' is hoboes, huh?" he cried indignantly. "Yeah, ornery, low-down, ring-tail bums—that's what yo' is! Yo' didn't spill yo' wuz George. Yo' kep' close as possums.

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Yo' let me palaver en palaver, me 'lowin' I had fetched up neah a darky.

"Yo' on'y made game o' me! Dod-rot yo'!" he ended, his shriveled frame all a-tremble, "I'll show yo', no measly bar'l-house stiff cayn come enny sich game on ole Jerry Mears!" And he lifted up his heavy knobby stick.

The yellow dog growled rumblingly, threateningly. The Frisco Kid backed away. His eyes fearfully upon the up-raised stick, his arms above his head to ward off the expected blow, he lifted his voice in remonstrance.

"Aw, bo! I didn't speak up at first 'cause I didn't know yer was a phoney man at all. I wasn't George, honest I wasn't. I didn't lamp yer pedlin' packs under yer coat, till yer showed 'em. And Gay-Cat, he's a blowed-in-the-glass, too, and he most always k'n tell a blowed-in-the-glass stiff even when far off—but yer fooled even him, bo, yer fooled even Gay-Cat. He wasn't wise yer was a phoney man at all."

Now there was that, in the Frisco Kid's mention of the Gay-Cat, which caused a quick and drastic change in the attitude of the blind pedler. He lowered the stick abruptly. He leaned toward the Kid, and once more gazing over the tarnished tops of his spectacles, he asked cautiously:

"Blowed-in-the-bottle stiffs yo' be, yeah? Shore how menny is yo'?"

But there was bothering the Frisco Kid a kind of vexation. That he, a blown-in-the-glass stiff, had not recognized in this blind man, at the very outset, another hobo and a phoney man was a mistake which savored of a lack of road knowledge. And the Kid prided himself on his knowledge of the road.

Of course, the truth was that this Southland was new territory to him. Yet that would not fully account for his mistake. And the Frisco Kid felt it was incumbent upon him somehow to account for that mistake. Wherefore, taking no note of the pedler's question but thinking only of what he himself last had said, he added in shamefaced apology:

"Yer see, yer is all dressed up. Gee, I thought yer was a planter and mebbe a mean and horstile one. And I ain't never see'd a blind phoney man before, leastwise one what carried a stick and was all dressed swell-like, like a jedge."

"I do dress elegan'-like," said the pedler, the long bony fingers of his left hand smoothing the green shiningness of his coat. "Ethiops en sich trash alwuz treats a white man a heap better, I raiken, when he's got a fine front like a jidge.

"But that feller with yo', bo—that feller yo' calls Gay-Cat—he hain't sayin' much, is he? Powerful quiet, mainly; hain't got no tongue, I s'pect; one o' them sign-makin' fellers, yeah?"

"Aw," said the Frisco Kid apologetically, "he's only a dog, Gay-Cat. A hobo dog."

"A dorg! Dingnations, thet's funny! I nevah had no idee o' thet. I raikened he wuz yo' buddie. But a dorg now, en the ole phoney man thinkin' all the time he wuz a stiff—hain't that the beatenest thing, though! Lemme see the little feller—he's little, hain't he?"

Proudly, in answer, the Kid put the Gay-Cat into the blind man's arms. The hair crested on the Gay-Cat's neck and again he growled. But the pedler lifted him up, and held him close to his peering, straining eyes, and inspected him, with the nodding head of approbation.

"What a powerful cute little feller," he said. "I hain't nevah see a wiser-lookin' dorg. En sich a elegan' yaller color! Knows the roads, I cal'late, en when a team o' mules is comin', he does, huh? I 'low yo' is right fond o' him; had him a long time; reg'lar buddie to yo', yeah? I raiken, now, yo' nevah would part with him, huh?—not fo' love o' money!"

Hastily the Frisco Kid snatched the dog from the pedler's arms. Something in the man's oily tone, a sort of cunningness in his questions, impinged upon the Kid's heart a sudden fear for his dog. And fortunate it was for the pedler that the Frisco Kid acted so precipitately, for just then, as if to bite, the dog snapped at the man's wrist.

"Aw, bo," said the Kid incoherently. " 'Course, I wouldn't part with Gay-Cat. Not for all the money ever made!"

The blind man listened closely, head on one side. The Kid swallowed and wet his lips.

"Yer see, bo," he tried to explain, "he's a blowed-in-the-glass stiff hisself, Gay-Cat. And he's my buddie that's been with me a awful long time, now. I won't never give him away. No," he repeated, "not for all the money ever made!"

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"Shucks!" said the pedler. "How yo' do take on, bo! How yo' do talk en sentimenter! Don't yo' s'pect ole Jerry's merely a-foolin' o' yo'? Dang it, bo! I wuz jist 'lowin' to fathom how fond yo' is o' him: I figgered yo' must think a mighty precious lot o' him, that he wuz jist ole pie to yo'—hem!—him bein' sich a pert little articule—yeah, en sich a elegan' yaller color! I cal'late, now, consid'able menny folks has wanted fo' to buy him o' yo', huh? Yeah, or to steal him?

"Yo'd raiken, now, a blind man like me 'ud want a dorg jist like him—a dorg to be a-leadin' o' me along the roads en up to farmhouses, en a dorg what 'ud bark consid'able when a span o' mules is comin', er a drove o' pigs, er —er a ottermobile behind, heh?

"But too menny dorgs has bit me in back yards, I cal'late, en lit out arter me along the roads. I'm all over bites, 'deed en 'deed I is. en I jist cayn't stand the pesky varmints. By Jefferson, I hates 'em! Yas, I does. All but thet dorg thar. He's a mighty smart little animule."

He cleared his throat.

"Neighbor," he said unctuously, "I raiken I sorter tuck to him right off—jist like I done tuck to yo'!"

CHAPTER II

"THE COMPINSASHUN O' THE LAWD"

THE Frisco Kid was oddly disturbed by the oily tone of the blind man, his fawning manner and flattering words. To change the subject, he asked, apropos of nothing—

"Where yer headin' for, this afternoon, bo?"

"Perkins Landin'."

"Perkins Landin'!—why that must be on the Mississippi. And here I've been aimin' to hit the river all along. I made up my mind, up Nebraska way, I'd strike for the Mississippi and then hobo south, mebbe walkin' the levees or floatin' down in a skift or a raff.

"Hoboes North say it's lots of fun, and the eats is fattenin'—coon and watermelons and — and sech stuff. I guess I'll join out with yer for the walk to Perkins. I'm a-goin' to mooch the main drag there. That's the closest town, ain't it?"

The blind man nodded quite eagerly.

"Hit's the closest, all right—on'y 'bout fo'teen mile along. But the Landin', hit ain't on the river nohow. Some year ago, hit wuz on the river fo' faih, but one night in the Spring-risin', the river she jist raired up en cut a new channel through a big bend, en put Perkins a swingin' good piece in the back country. En thar Perkins be yit, waitin' fo' the ole Mississipp' to tuck another dern-fool, whoop-jamboree notion, en fetch back, en make hit a river-town once moah.

"But arter we gits to Perkins, hit's on'y a tolerable short walk to the river en Shanty-Boat Town, which is the real landin' nowadays. I got a shanty-boat thar. Yo' bundle along with me; we won't fetch up thar ternight; but toreckly we does, yo' cayn come aboard en float down the river on the boat with me en the Ole Woman, en the colored wench, Phœbe, en that blame' ornery little runt, Gamaliel.

"Thar's a sight o' room fo' the dorg en yo' on the boat, en plenty to eat—sugar-cane, corn pone, chickens, bacon, roast ears o' corn en all sich prime quality stuff. En thar hain't nothin' like floatin' down the ole Mississipp' in a shanty-boat. Thar hain't nothin' like the river nohow.

"Wunse yo' fish en swim en laze along hit, en float down quiet as cayn be through the nights, en the ole shanty-boat goin' lap-lap very soft-like, en the moon over the levee big en fat, en a banjo tinklin' way off among the nigger cabins en—en, bo, yo'll nevah want to leave the river ag'in, no moah!"

"Go with yer? Go with yer, a-floatin' down the river?" cried the Frisco Kid, his imagination aflame. "Sure as shootin', bo, I'll go with yer! And the Gay-Cat, he'll go, too!"

The Frisco Kid led the way out into the hot white road. The pedler tapped after on his heavy stick, a shrewd smile on his lean brown bird-like face. Once he paused and sharply queried:

"Don't fo'git the dorg. Is the dorg a-comin'?"

"Aw, Gay-Cat, he never gets left behind. Yer don't have to watch *him*. Why, bo, he's here right at my side—kinder skeered to come 'longside of yer, I think; kinder skeered of yer stick."

"Give me yo' han', bo," said the blind man, "en yo' cayn lead me. Hit's hard a-walkin' the road in the dark, en alwuz

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a-listenin' fo' hawgs er mules a-comin'."

"That's so. I was wonderin' how yer tramped about, pedlin' phoney stuff, and you blind."

The Kid held out his hand. The man did not answer, but pawed about once or twice; then grasped it and closed his long bony fingers 'round it, tight as talons.

"Dingnations!" he said, startled. "What a small han' yo' got, bo! Why, yo' must be a little shaver, not much bigger'n that thar dorg o' yores, I cal'late, er thet ornery little runt, Gamaliel."

"Gay-May—" began the Kid at this second mention of the name. "Say, bo, that's a moniker jes' like Gay-Cat's here, only longer. Who's him?"

As though suddenly he remembered something, the man paused and still holding tightly to the Kid's hand, turned 'round to look back the way he had come, and to listen, head on one side.

"Hear ennything?" he asked suspiciously. "Hear him a-comin'?"

"Who?"

"Gamaliel."

"Aw, say now, bo," remonstrated the Frisco Kid, "I wouldn't know him if I see'd him. Who is he, now? A dog like Gay-Cat?"

"A dorg!" repeated the blind man. "Gamaliel, a dorg! Naw, he's a boy—jist a plain, no-'count river-rat. What in tarnashun caused yo' to 'spect he wuz a dorg? Gamaliel, a dorg!"

The blind man snorted. He said nothing more, however, but quite complacently put up his stick on the crook of his right arm and, by pressure on the Kid's hand, signified his desire to go on.

Thus, the Frisco Kid leading the way, the dog tagging at his heels, they went along the winding white road, now up over little hills, now down between bottoms of cotton-fields. And sometimes the fields were drab, thoroughly plucked and empty; and sometimes all mottled white and black, with the down of the bursted pods and the shapes of the pickers moving in and out, and bending down and up—and all lazily, for it was very warm.

There were rows of ramshackle negro cabins where pigs and starved hounds and half-naked piccaninnies waddled between sunflower stalks and through broken reed-overgrown fences and out, in a conglomerate scramble, into the road to meet them; and now and anon, on a rise of ground, a cool white house of many tall pillars and long small-paned windows that flashed, from far off, between interlacing roses and urns of orange marigolds and purple petunias.

The blind man snorted afresh. He turned, altogether suddenly, upon the Kid.

"Bo, hit's mighty sartain to ole Jerry Mears, now, that yo' be a sinful lad. Yo' hain't nevah read the Good Book, I raiken, er yo'd nevah have made sich a mistake. Gamaliel a dorg's name!" And he snorted once again.

"Accordin' to the Good Book," he whined on, "Gamaliel means the compinsashun o' the Lawd. That's what it means—the pay o' the good Lawd fo' what He done tuck away en destroyed. En thet little runt, how'd he come by that name? Why, he wuz jist cast up by a flood.

"ONE night hit wuz, fo' year agone—the same year o' the Spring-risin' thet fetched ole Perkins Landin' into the back country. The ole Mississipp', hit had done gone en tuck one o' hits reg'lar dern-fool whoop-jamboree notions—swapped 'round from a natchal color to most a yaller, en raired up, en cut loose fo' faih.

"Racin' like a ottermobile hit wuz—racin' like a road full o' yaller ottermobiles, sixty mile a hour, never-endin', hellbent fo' fury, en totin' all befo' hit—pigs, bridges, skiffs en raffs, horses, yaller pines, willers, mules, chickens, en hull houses sum'times.

"Arter a spell, the rain stopped—hit had ben rainin' blue murder like the sky wuz cracked. Logs en drift o' all kinds wuz still boomin' along, en I wuz layin' on en off, in a skift, fetchin' it to shore to sell bimeby down the mills. I could see a consid'able sight better them days than now.

"Wal, one night, all of a sudden I see, down the river a stretch, a hull house snagged on Hawg-Back Towhead. I hitched my britches en lit out arter it same as if it wuz a bar'l o' fo'ty-rod."

The blind man paused and ran his tongue out over his puckered lips with a kind of relish. It was for all the truth as if he were inventing the story, bit by bit, and finding surprise and delight in the total of his invention.

"Thet house, hit wuz a ornery little two-story clapboard affaih that had skipped down from Gawd knows whah—mebbe

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from Illinois, mebbe up Mizzoura way, or mebbe ag'in from ole Kaintuck.

"The lower story wuz plumb under water, tangled fitten to hold tell the Judgment Day in the tops o' the cottonwoods of ole Hawg-Back Sandbar, en the hull shootin'-match wuz tilted over, same as if it had drank too much licker.

"I went a-scootin' down to hit, fo'ty mile a hour. When I fetched up aneah the house, the current wuz a-tearin' through the cottonwoods en 'round the sides o' the wrack so powerful strong en loud, I jist couldn't hear mysef think. I pulled 'round to the slant side en clumb, easy as pie, right out'n the skiff upon the sill o' a winder.

"Hit wuz darker'n a Ethiop's skin inside, en some quieter; en as I set on the sill, I could hear the water a-washin' 'bout—hit must 'a' covered the floor tolerable deep. En thar wuz a squashy thump, too, now en ag'in.

"Bimeby I got to see sort o' middlin' well, en I made out a bundle o' rags floatin' in the water on the floor, en thumpin' ag'in the wall kind o' squashy-like. It thumped the wall powerful heavy fo' a rag bundle, I jidged, en I begun to suspicion sum'thin'. I waded through the water, en catched hold, en—dingnations, hit wuz a woman en she wuz daid!

"Mebbe I warn't scared! I backed away, all over shakin' en cold, en then—kabump! my head hit agin sum'thin' that wuz hangin' from the ceilin', en I thought hit wuz sperits, en my hair stiffened en begun to climb, en I could hear the current tearin' 'round the house en the body thumpin' plain as day, en I didn't look round, not immedjit.

"En then I hearn a cry, kind o' small en feeble, same as a ghos' makes when a-rovin' in sorrer, en the starch went clean out'n me, en I drapped to my knees en wrastled in pray'r.

"But the good Lawd wuz with ole Jerry Mears, thet night, en He raised me up en He done showed me thar warn't nothin' to be frightened about, pertic'lar. Jist a little tad hit wuz, a-slung from the ceilin' in a sort o' swing so's the water wouldn't rise to hit tell the last.

"That drownded woman wuz the little feller's mammy. I went through the hull upper story, en everythin' wuz washin' about; but thar warn't no one else besides, no man, so I 'spected that baby had ben half a orphing.

"Wal, he wuz a full orphing sure enough now, I raikened, so I tuck him along en I says, 'This pore creetur, he be the compinsashun o' the good Lawd fo' all He done tuck away en destroyed.' En I felt right down sorry fo' the little tad, en I wuz jist all pie to him. En thet's why I calls him Gamaliel."

While the blind phoney man beguiled the time thus, the long afternoon drew into the lambency of sunset. The darkies moved away through the deepening purple of the cotton- and corn-fields, and only the great-bosomed "Yah-yah!" of some healthy happy black woman floated across the lonesome acres to the two upon the straggling road.

The fragrance of magnolia blossoms before a negro's cabin-door sharpened in the cool of the evening. The road became, all at once, very peaceful and very very lonesome.

"Hit's shore comin' dark; le's camp heah," suggested the blind man. "We cayn't fetch Perkins ternight, I cal'late; leastwise, not unless thar be a moon to walk by."

They turned off the road and sat down, in the twilight, between the roots of some live-oak trees.

"I's some corn-dodgers en bacon lef' sence noon. We cayn eat thet snack fo' supper, share en share alike—yo', me en the dorg. Oh, the dorg'll git his share; I don't fo'git him, sho'. I's tuck to him consid'able. Indeedy, I never knowed mysef to tuck to a animule like that befo'."

The Gay-Cat backed away from the pedler's outreaching hands. But the pedler only laughed and, when the corn-dodgers and bacon were equally divided, flung hunks of meat and cake to the dog, and talked to him and tried, with a remarkable mildness and patience, to coax him near enough to pet him.

Said he—

"No, I hain't never knowed mysef to tuck to a animule like that befo'."

Just then, the Frisco Kid sat up to listen, a hunk of corn-cake halfway to his lips. Some one was coming along the road, someone that whimpered and sobbed out shocking curses in a high piping treble. The dragging steps drew nearer, and the childish plaintive voice.

"Dod-rot thet ornery ole houn'!" said the child's voice fiercely. "The ole no-'count pirut, I 'spec' he'll be a-wallopin' me

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double, now. And I cayn't git outer tellin' him what the Ole Woman done said—'n' he'll whale me worser when he's hearn it.

"Oh, golly, I wisht I might nevah fin' him, but jist keep walkin' 'n' a-walkin' so far away he cayn't nevah fin' me to wallop me, no moah. The ole son-o'-a-steambo't-whistle, why in tarnashun cayn't he leave off a-wallopin' me!"

The face of the pedler lost its smile. It was shocking, that vehement change which swept over him. His hand tightened on the heavy knobby stick.

"Gamaliel!" was all he said.

But the youngster on the road heard him. His plaintive whimperings stopped abruptly. Very quietly he came in between the trees.

"I's heah, Jerry," he said with a sort of forced, oldish nonchalance. "Large as life, I be, 'n' chipper as a oriole. And I's brung some truck from the Ole Woman fo' yo', yo' raspy ole rapscallion!"

CHAPTER III

THE KID GAINS AN ADMIRER AND LOSES AN ADHERENT

HE WAS a tiny fellow, clad in the most unexpected costume imaginable. He wore a huge flapping straw hat, turned up in front and fastened with a safety-pin. A red bandanna was knotted about his thin neck; a cap-pistol protruded from the little leather holster at his belt; and below, on his short legs, were a pair of chaparejos—black, hairy, toy cowboy leggings.

"Yo' consarn'd little cuss," said the blind man. "None o' yo' sass, now. What did the Ole Woman say fo' yo' to tell me?"

From under the big rakish hat, the little sunburnt baby face looked up at the blind pedler. The eyes were blue, a clear sapphire blue, and oddly round, and very old with a depth of worldly wisdom strange in a child so small and young. The sweet pouting upper lip trembled.

"She says yo' warn't to come back to the bo't, nohow. She gimme a snack fo' yo', 'n' she say, 'Jerry, yo' ole rip, look betwixt the slabs o' corn pone fur the bacon.' Them's her very words, mainly. And she says thar's bin men a-ha'ntin' the bo't like ghos's. And—'n' she says yo' warn't to wallop me this time, no moah."

The pedler sat up.

"She hain't—she hain't nevah said that last, nohow! Dad fetch yo', what did she say?"

The little fellow began to cry all at once, his knuckles in his eyes.

"Wul—wul, hang it, she says yo' war to dust me good. The Ole Woman, rot her, she says yo' warn't to fohgit to tuck off my cowboy leggin's, so's to make it a good job."

The blind man rose up, reaching for the boy.

"Tuck off yo' leggin's—why did she say thet? Dog my cats, don't she know I cayn wallop yo' without tuckin' off them things? Why did she say thet?"

"I dunno, only mebbe so's yo'd hurt me worser."

"I'll show yo' if I cayn hurt yo' a-plenty; I'll give yo' a power o' med'cin; I'll show yo' how I cayn wallop yo'!"

He reached for the boy. The boy ducked away. But blindly, viciously, the stoop-shouldered man flung himself upon him. Then he arose to his knees and raised, above the boy, the heavy stick.

Now, the hair and leather of the leggings did not protect the seat of the boy's trousers and, when the stick fell under the man's full strength, it hurt and the boy screamed.

The Frisco Kid sprang up. White and hot—for he remembered a time when he himself had been cruelly beaten by the hobo that had taught him the life of the road—the Kid sprang up.

"Stop!" he cried, his voice choking. "Stop larrupin' that kid!"

The stick remained upraised.

"Me stop thrashin' my own kid?" the pedler snarled, turning a furious face upon him. "None o' yo' lip, yo' dod-rotted tramp! Yo' keep out'n this, er I'll tan *yo'!*"

"Come on, then!" cried the Frisco Kid, desperate and seething within with a hot anger. "I ain't been a hobo roughin' it for nothin'. You jes' try to larrup me—I'm some bigger'n that poor little kid!"

The phoney man jumped to his feet, his mouth snarling. He raised the stick. The Frisco Kid crouched for a rush. And then the snarl fled the man's face; the stick dropped to earth; he calmed suddenly. He even forced a smile.

"Bo," he said, "we hain't got no business, yo' en me, quarrelin' en raisin' jist ole Cain. Hit's plumb foolishness. En I won't wallop the little tad heah, not if yo' don't like hit. I wuz jist a-foolin' him, ennyways.

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"I gen'ally hates to beat him, I do, though he does act low-down en ornery to me who's fed en clothed en kep' him, en treated him lovin' en elegan'—jist like ole pie. But I hain't hankerin' to quarrel with yo'. I's tuck to yo' consid'able, en them I's tuck to, I nevah sour on er quarrel with. Bo," he ended unctuously, "le's all be frien's."

"That's me," said the Kid; "I'm agreeable if yer is." Still he eyed the man coldly. "But I don't want no beatin' of kids around me. I seen too much of it."

The pedler turned away, anxious to hide his chagrin.

"I wonder what the Ole Woman meant 'bout his leggin's," he murmured. "She's a bothersome lot, the Ole Woman. Why in all dingnations don't she speak out plain? En, too, 'bout the bacon betwixt the corn pone."

He reached down suddenly and picked up, from where Gamaliel had dropped it, the paper bag of food. He opened the bag and, his dim eyes looking over the tarnished tops of his glasses, peered within. On the sudden he made to put a hand into the bag, then thought better of it and covertly glanced about him, his spectacles outstanding and peering in the twilight like the pop-eyes of some great bird.

The little boy had ceased crying and was watching the Frisco Kid, a sort of admiration in his moist blue eyes. The pedler turned his back on them and put his hand into the bag. There was the crinkle as of rumpled paper. Then Mears drew out a closed fist and surreptitiously transferred something from that closed fist into one of the pockets of his swallow-tail coat.

"By jingo!" he ejaculated softly, "thet Ole Woman, she's shore the smartes' one! I couldn't make hit out noway, head nor tail. But bacon 'twixt the corn pone! Hain't that the elegan'est dodge, though!"

He grew all at once serious.

"En so I cayn't go back to the boat, nohow. They's watchin' hit, huh? I 'spect we'll have to cler out'n heah, en drap down the river a piece befo' we cayn work hit strong ag'in."

HE SWUNG about with sudden thought. The little fellow, Gamaliel, had clasped, rather stealthily, the Frisco Kid's hand and the Frisco Kid had held on to his tiny hand tightly, warmly, a strange feeling in his heart of commiseration for the boy and of glad guardianship.

Now, however, as the pedler swung about so abruptly, the little fellow, as though gravely guilty, pulled his hand away and, in a kind of fear, retreated.

"Heah, yo' Gamaliel!" said the pedler. "Yo' hump along to the boat ternight, en tell the Ole Woman to cast off en drap down fi' mile to the big crossin' below Chel'sfo'd Township, and to tie up the boat in the crick thar. I'll bundle down thataway along the road in 'bout another day, I raiken, moah or less."

"All right, Jerry," agreed the boy, very subdued.

"Wal, yo' be up to snuff en foot it mighty tight. En yo' meet me, bright en early termorrer mawnin'—en no slouchin' if yo' know what's good fo' yo'—at the big slantin' bay-tree neah the canebrake a swingin' good piece this side o' Perkins Landin'.

"En yo' tell the Ole Woman to give yo' some moah stuff fo' me, en to be powerful cautious—to drap the boat down, nighttime, en tie up whah the willers en rushes is bunchy, en—en not to mind 'bout yo' leggin' things whin I wallop yo'—I'll 'tend to that, by Zachariah! En now yo' git up en git."

Submissively, yet with an admiring look back at the Kid, the little fellow walked out into the road and headed along it, the great hairy chaps on his short legs moving slowly and heavily into the thickening night. The Frisco Kid knew how lonely, how hedged with strange menacing shadows was a road at night; how long a mile seemed when one walked solitary in darkness and in silence.

"Aw, bo!" he interposed. "Yer can't let him go alone all that way. It's dark along the road, and kinder scary and lonesome."

The blind man cackled.

"Oh, he's not afeard—Gamaliel. He's traveled alone heaps o' times, nights. En he knows the roads, he does—knows 'em like a spellin'-book er a singin' jawgraphy. He'll take shelter in some farmhouse er negro cabin if he gits tuckered out. Bo, yo' leave thet kid be!" The last was almost a threat.

"We'll sleep heah," continued the phoney man. "Thar'll be no moon ternight, er termorrer night, I cal'late; en the tuck is all out'n me; en I hain't carin' to fetch Perkins er even the next farmhouse, pertic'lar.

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So we'll doss heah. En termorrer we'll go on ag'in, en mebbe the next day we'll hit the shanty-boat en float down the river lazy-like, as I done said—yo', me en that thar cute little dorg."

The Frisco Kid was not so sure, now, that a shanty-boater's life on the Mississippi was the happiest of lives—at any rate a shanty-boat on which lived, also, Jerry Mears, the phoney man. But he curled up between the roots of the trees, the Gay-Cat snug and warm under his coat.

He awoke before dawn. There was just the faintest paleness in the east. He sat up and stretched himself and looked at that pale patch in the sky which was spreading out and brightening up. Then he rubbed his eyes to get the sleepers out, and yawned loudly to awaken the others.

But there were no others. The Kid first missed the Gay-Cat. The Gay-Cat was not lying beside him, quiet and heavy-headed. But then the Gay-Cat often had nightmares, and crawled away and burrowed under some leaves. The Kid looked around for the pedler. There was the flattened place in the fallen leaves where the pedler had stretched out; but no pedler.

The Frisco Kid remembered, then. In the deep of the night, as he lay asleep in the leaves, he had heard a little yelp and some one had leaned over him. Then it seemed only the disquieting dim part of a dream. He had turned over, no more than half awakened, and insensibly had slipped back into sleep.

But now he knew. The pedler had leaned over him in the night, snatched up the frightened dog, and gone quietly away into the night. He had stolen Gay-Cat!

CHAPTER IV

"NOBODY AT ALL IN THE WORLD WOULD TUCK ON SO 'BOUT ME!"

THE Frisco Kid was afoot, shaken and distraught. There was a desperate drawn look to his peaked pale face, to his anguish-filled eyes.

He must find the little hobo dog, his only friend, his one buddie, the comrade that had made hoboing pleasant, the companion and bunkie in his wanderings and railroading, in his times of fortune and good set-downs, in rain and cold and slammed back-doors and hunger. Without the Gay-Cat, life was empty, unthinkable. He must get back his little yellow dog.

He started along the road at a run, his grimy hands clenched tightly. Then, realizing that perhaps the whole day and many long miles were ahead of him, he slackened to a walk; but still he walked with a certain killing eagerness that permitted of no rests nor idled moments near cool, boy-luring creeks or sun-brightening thickets.

He stopped at no farmhouse or cabin to beg breakfast—he had no stomach for breakfast. Only, every little while, he shook his clenched fist at the road ahead and, his pale face grimacing threateningly, he whispered—

"Yer measly old phoney man, I'll learn yer to steal my dog!"

Unsparingly he blamed himself for not having been more wary of the oily leering old pedler. The man had paid too much attention to the Gay-Cat. He had "tuck" to him too much.

The Kid saw it all now. The blind man had told him stories of the river and of shanty-boating merely to beguile him until such time as he could steal, quite sneakily, his dog. And he wanted the dog, of course, to guide him along the road. With the Gay-Cat leading him, mules and automobiles, farm-wagons and pigs would be no great danger.

The morning was still young and dewy when the Frisco Kid approached a huge bay-tree which was tilted over at a dizzy angle. Here the blind man had instructed Gamaliel to meet him that dawning.

There were crumbs of corn pone on the trampled grass where, in all probability, the blind man and Gamaliel and the stolen dog had broken their fast; but there was no sight of the trio. Everything was hushed and Sunday-like.

The Frisco Kid footed it on, fast and desperately. But never, through the morning, did he catch sight of the stoop-shouldered seedy man, the cowboy-attired Gamaliel, or his little mongrel dog.

It was coming noon when he paused at a negro cabin, not to beg a hand-out, but to ask whether the incongruous trio had passed that way. As he opened the rickety leather-hinged gate, he almost trod upon a little piccaninny lying in the weeds of the yard, naked save for a short dirty cotton shift, and blissfully sucking upon the rag stopper of a bottle of milk.

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The urchin drew his mouth from the stopper with a kind of *plub*, gurgled and gooed, and playfully pawed up at him with pudgy little black hands and legs.

At the baby's feeble sounds, four or five great gaunt hounds, stretched out on the threshold of the tumble-down cabin, raised their lean heads, saw the Kid, yawned and got sleepily afoot. Then followed by a perfect mob of puppies and half-grown dogs, fifteen strong at the least, the hounds came out to nose him.

The Kid waded through them with difficulty. He made up to a youngish black mammy, with bandanna-wrapped head, who was sitting, fat and gross in a none-too-clean gown of calico, on a bench to one side of the cabin door, and contentedly smoking a cob pipe. She was a picture of complacent and utter indolence.

Said the Frisco Kid enviously—

"Yer got plenty dogs here."

The woman removed the pipe from her thick lips to laugh uproariously, as at some good joke.

"Houn's? Oh, Lawd A'mighty, yas! We got plenty houn's, honey—got 'nuff houn's foh a body to be satafied wid, tol-er'bly, Ah raiken. But most ebbery pusson has a passel ob houn's daown disaways."

The while the woman laughed and rolled out her words, there had arisen, within the cabin, the sounds of some one moving about. Then a kinky white-haired old grandfather or great-grandfather, with bushy snowy brows above spectacles that lacked lenses, came out to the threshold of the cabin, and stood there attentively listening, and shaking all the time in the sunlight with palsy. As the woman finished, he broke out volubly:

"But Lan' ob Canaan, didn't we done pu'chase de fines' dawg dis mawnin', Rosamun'! He wahn't no low-daown trash houn'. He wah a prime quality dawg, an' pow'ful fotchin'! A elegan' animule, de blin' man what done sold him to us himsef done said; a prime relegjus man, he wah—he could rattle off de Good Book better'n enny pahson Ah eber hearn—jis' lak nuff'n!"

The Frisco Kid started at the old man's apt description of Jerry Mears. He was on the right track then. He asked eagerly—

"Was it a yellow dog with nothin' much of a tail to speak of?"

The old man beamed and nodded so vehemently the glassless spectacles slid down his black nose and he shook all over and could not speak. Smiling broadly and greasily, the woman said:

"Dat's him, a li'l dawg wid a li'l tail an' my! de most oncommonest yaller culluh. He wah no slouch, dat dawg. Run to de gate, he would, an' scratch it wid his laigs, an' moan—Lawsy, it wah fitten to make a body's heart bust to hearn him tuk on.

"An' dat blin' man, he done gib him to us foh a cup ob coffee—said he had tukken his bre'kfus' undah de slant bay-tree, daown de road a spell. An' he gib me dis ring, too."

She held up one hand to exhibit, amid the folds of flesh of her second finger, a cheap glassy gimcrack.

"An' he said dat de Queen ob Sheba would be pow'ful glad to weah it on her lily-white han'."

"An' dat she would, Rosamun'," said the old man, by this time recovered. "Dat she would, de Queen ob Sheba hernsef."

"Was there any one with him," asked the Kid—"any one besides the dog?"

"No, honey; he wah alone—a pow'ful smaht man what could fin' his way alone an' he blin' as a ole bat."

"An' den, two hour agone," broke in the old man, eager to talk, "a li'l chile come along, cryin' lak some one wah daid, an' he says it wah his yaller dawg what his pappy done sold. He said his pappy wah awful raspy wid him, times, an' de las' time his pappy had up an' sold de dawg jis' out'n plain ornery cussedness.

"He said he wanted dat li'l quality dawg back ag'in, not foh nuff'n but foh good money. An' he bo't him ob us foh a dollah. We wah plumb against sellin' dat fotchin' prime critur, but he done tuck on so, we couldn't lay to disapp'int de li'l fellah, no-how."

"A little boy in cowboy-leggin's and a straw hat turned up in front?"

"How'd yo' know, honey?" asked the woman, startled, her eyes rolling big and white. "Dat's him, sho' 'nuff—a mite ob a tad got up regar'less. An' wahn't he de pow'fulles' pooty man, though, wid his blue trembly eyes an' wispy-corny yaller haih! He gib us a fi-dollah bill foh de dawg.

"'Nashun lucky we had de change. We don't us'ally hab change befoh de cotton am all picked heah'bouts. Gits all our

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things frum de store in Perkins, we does, an' sence the kunnel come back, we gits credit frum Kunnel Chel'sfo', too, daown de Township way.

"But heah yo'," she said to the old man. "Stir yo' stumps, gran'daddy, an' fotch out dat fi'-dollah bill foh de young genlman." The old man disappeared with glad readiness into the cabin. "It ain't menny niggahs has a fi'-dollah bill," the woman added as though in explanation and proud justification of her command.

Suddenly she noticed something over near the rickety leather-hinged gate.

"Drot yo', Teddy Roosenfelt, drap dat bottle!" she called sharply to a young roly-poly pup who had stolen the bottle of milk from the piccaninny and, with it between his paws, was sagaciously sucking at the rag stopper.

The pup dropped the bottle incontinently, and the baby rolled over and retrieved it with pudgy fists. The baby sucked, the woman went on smoking. And then the old man reappeared, holding a greenback proudly in his two shaking hands. As though studying it wisely, he bent his woolly head and lensless glasses over the paper money—and there was in his attitude a curious childlike awe.

"We don't off'n gits to handle papah money daown heah," he said. "Dis am a pow'ful fotchin' new bill. Me oh my! hear it crinkle, though. Not menny niggahs has a fi'-dollah bill!"

"Which way did the little feller go with the dog?"

"Dat way, daown de road, honey," instructed the woman.

"An' I 'speck he sho' made a bargain, too, dat li'l tad," the old man called wistfully after him. "Dah ain't menny dawgs lak dat li'l quality dawg. But den it ain't lak we got on'y six or seben houn's lak some niggahs—we got plenty houn's."

THE Frisco Kid continued on along the road. From the top of a rise he saw, far off, the old Mississippi. It was fully a mile wide in this section, of the color of an Autumn leaf, and hedged on one side by high levees and on the far side by green-jungled banks.

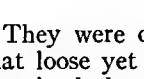
And there was a sternwheeler, white and tiny with distance, coughing up the river and zigzagging from shore to shore like a hapless chip, as it shaved the greenery on the opposite bluffs and then skirted the earth of the levees, in seeking the sleeping water near the banks and along the bars.

Ahead, the Kid came to a fork in the road and, quickly deciding to take the wider stretch yet fearing to lose the trail, he thought to stop and inquire his way at the next farmhouse.

The next farmhouse he approached proved to be a one-storied rambling, dilapidated frame-building in the flat of a small valley. It was flanked by numerous white-washed outbuildings—chicken-roosts, barns and cow-sheds. Under some scantily-leafed trees alongside the road, a number of corn-cribs stood.

As the Frisco Kid drew near, a huge brown woodchuck darted from the bins, streaked along the road in a little hot white puff of dust, and then disappeared into the jimson weeds on the other side of the road.

Boy-like, the Kid reached down for a stone in the road to hurl after the disappearing rodent. And then he saw something on the corn-cribs—something which caused him, forthwith, to drop the stone. On one of the cratings of the bins were the following signs:



They were ciphers. They were part of that loose yet covert system of characters contrived, by the great free-masonry of hoboes, for the safe transmission of secrets. Every tramp knows them and their hidden meanings.

In the great free masonry of hobodom, the first meant, "Don't touch! The farmer has some authority in the district;" and the second, "Buckshot! The farmer has a gun and uses it."

The Kid changed his mind about inquiring his way at that particular farmhouse. But, a step beyond the farmhouse in the feather-flecked yard, he saw a man scattering feed from a tin basin to a cackle of chickens—a lanky bewhiskered man in faded jeans and wide-brimmed straw hat, who wore neither shoes nor coat.

There was something so hoboish in the man's appearance that the Kid got a sudden accession of courage. He felt that the man might be a lowbrowed farmhand or a "gay-cat" who had landed a job. He leaned over the fence and called to him.

The man leisurely put down the tin basin

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of feed, shoved his hands into the pockets of his jeans and approached slouchily.

"Wa-al?" he drawled.

"Yer ain't seen a little kid go by here with a dog, has yer?" asked the Kid. "Or a old blind phoney man?"

The other did not answer immediately. A great bluebottle fly had alighted upon a rock in the road and was industriously cleaning its many legs. The man made a little sound like *ps-s-tl* A jet of amber juice shot from his puckered lips, hit the rock in the road, bathed the fly and swept it off its perch.

"Jeber Socks, yas," the man answered, thereupon. "I bo't thet yaller dorg fr'm thet ol' pedler what passes h'yer onct in a while. Bo't him to watch th' chickens.

"Tied him to th' fence, I did, with a ring 'round this h'yer topmost wire 'nd a string fr'm thet ring to his collar. And all he had to do in perticklar was to run up 'nd down, 'nd back 'nd forth along this fence, 'nd keep the chickens in, 'nd th' darkies out."

The farmer yawned prodigiously and, once again and dexterously, spit a stream of tobacco-juice at the rock in the road.

"And then, by jings!" he continued. "Not a hour gone, who should come up h'yer but a little yunker all togged out in th' beatenest kind o' clothes, 'nd with a cap-pistol, mind you, most as dangersome-lookin' as though it was real. And he offers me a dollar 'nd a half fur him, thet yunker, 'nd I sees whar I was makin' money right aways 'nd easy as pie. I'm no slouch, I hain't, when it comes to downright hard-headed biz'nus.

" 'Wa-al, bub,' I says, jest like thet, none too anxious-like, y' understand—'I don't k'yer sech a heap to tuck paper money,' I says, 'but hol', a bargain's a bargain,' I says, ' 'nd the good Lawd will pervide,' I says."

The man thereupon withdrew both hands from his pockets to exhibit in one a five-dollar bill and to stroke with the other, as he studied the bill, his long ragged whiskers.

"I wonder whar he come by this fibe-dollar bill? It's a sight o' money fur sech a speck of a yunker. I wonder——"

He spat, without a care for marksmanship, into the road.

"By Jeber Socks!" he exclaimed, "I wonder ef the paper's good!"

The Kid dug out along the road, very fast. Gamaliel and the dog were only an hour in advance of him, according to the farmer's story, and he must soon overtake them.

Perhaps a half-hour had intervened when he noted, ahead, a little cloud of dust. It was just such a dust-cloud as the scurrying woodchuck had raised, only a deal magnified. Presently, in the cloud of dust, he made out the heavy-legged and tiny figure of Gamaliel, trudging along most nonchalantly and dragging after him by an absurd length of hay-rope, a little yellow drooping-headed dog.

The Frisco Kid emitted a wild whoop of triumph and joy. The little tad turned 'round. The dog's sharp head came up and, with a yelp of delight, he tore the leading-rope free from the hand of Gamaliel and dashed madly back to the Kid.

The Kid was on his knees, hugging the Gay-Cat to him, bending down so that the leaping joyfully-barking dog might lick his face in an excess of love and happiness.

The Frisco Kid looked up at last, his deep-sunken eyes bright and dewy. And the little tad turned eyes to him that were bright and dewy, too, and that were, besides, wistful, pathetically wistful. With a pout of sweet baby lips, the little fellow gulped:

"Jiminy, yo' keers heaps fo' thet puppy, 'n' he 'pears to keer heaps fo' yo'. I nevah see sich takin's-on 'n' huggin's. Nobody—nobody 'cept ole deef-'n'-dumb Phœbe, my black mammy, mebbe—nobody at all in the world would tuck on so 'bout me!"

CHAPTER V

THE KID AND GAMALIEL MAKE TOGETHER A GREAT FRIENDSHIP

THE Frisco Kid got to his feet and looked down at the wistful little chap.

"Aw, Gay-May!" he said inarticulate and singularly stirred. "Aw, say now, Gay-May! It ain't as bad as that, is it? Jerry Mears, yer father now, he'd take on consider'ble if yer was lost, or stolen like Gay-Cat. And the Old Woman, I'll bet she'd ——"

Perhaps it was that the Kid had sounded a wrong note in his attempt to console the little tad; perhaps it was that the little tad already was ashamed of his wistful words; but anyway he burst out fiercely:

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"Oh, dad blame it, don't talk to me 'bout them ornery ole rips. Don't tell me Jerry Mears 'ud make ovah me—rot him, he on'y whales me, hides the stuffin' out'n me. He don't keer fo' me, nohow, 'n' nuther does the Ole Woman. Hanged ef I knows why, 'cept mebbe 'cuz he ain't my right pappy 'n' she hain't my mammy at all."

"Not your father! Not yer folks at all!"

The Frisco Kid was shocked. Then, on the sudden, he remembered the phoney man's story of the flood. He remembered the dead woman in the floating house. And he said with a sympathy almost incoherent:

"I know it's kinder tough, Gay-May, but then it might be worse. Lookit me. I'se got a mother 'way over in Californya,what's old and what's waitin' for me all the time. But I can't seem to go back. There's somethin' in my blood, somethin' what keeps me movin' on always. I donno," he added pensively, "I don't understand it at all."

He hastened to change the disquieting subject. He asked—

"Where was yer to meet old Jerry again?"

"Down t'other side o' Perkins Landin'."

"Well let's go on to Perkins. We won't go beyond it to meet Mears. I'll throw my feet in Perkins and get somethin' to eat for bofe of us, and Gay-Cat too. I'm beginnin' to feel all empty inside. I didn't have no scoff this mornin', I was so feverish 'bout Gay-Cat. And Perkins now, it ain't so far, is it?"

The little fellow shook his sombreroed head.

"No; not sich a mighty ways. Jis' 'round t'other side o' thet hill ovah thar. Thet hill, it war a bluff on the ole Mississipp' wunst, they say, when it went a-boomin' along heah, 'n' it war called the Jumpin' Off Knoll.

"But it seems a purty longish stretch off to me, bo. I's done some powerful tall walkin' this mawnin', I cal'late, 'n' I's kinder all wore out. I ruther wish I could rest heah a spell."

The Frisco Kid was hungry. He looked along the white winding road and, through the glare of the early afternoon, he could see no house at which he might batter the back door.

Perkins Landing was, to all appearances, the nearest place at which he might secure food. Yet the little fellow pleaded that he was too tired, just then, to hike the distance to the town. The Kid, wanting to be generous yet urged by hunger, found himself in a predicament.

But unexpectedly, as Gamaliel sat down in the jimson weeds, the Kid noticed the heavy chaps on his legs.

"Gee whiz!" he exclaimed. "No wonder yer tired, Gay-May! I'll bet, if I had to foot it with them hairy heavy things on my legs—I'll bet I'd be jes' trimmed down to nothin', and ready to drop right now. Why don't yer take 'em off? It'll lighten yer up a bit, and I'll pack 'em and we'll make Perkins and a feed as easy as flyin'."

"Hain't thet the bangest thing! Why I nevah thought of it!" And the little fellow smiled delightedly.

The Frisco Kid knelt down in the dust on one knee and helped the little fellow unbuckle the leggings. As one legging came off, he hefted it up in his hand.

"Whew, ain't it heavy, though! And dusty—why, I'll bet there's a ton of dust in it. Lookit!"

He shook the legging and beat it vigorously with one hand. Well, as he did, out of it amid a smoke of dust dropped, like so many falling leaves, a number of crisp new greenbacks, fully a dozen of them. He looked at them, mute, his eyes dilated with amazement.

"Dern thet Ole Woman!"swore Gamaliel softly. "So thet's what she meant a-tellin' ole Jerry to tan ole Harry outer me, 'n' tuck off them leggin' things to make it worser! Hain't she the most treacherousest lowdown, ornery ole busybody, though!"

Amazement had fled the Kid's wide eyes. His eyes had narrowed, all at once, with suspicion.

"What's the gag, Gay-May?" he asked sharply. "Is these bills good?"

The little fellow was surprised in his turn.

"Good? Wul, say! Is watermelon good? Is 'simmons arter a frost good? Is cakes 'n' candies 'n' ice-cream 'n' pies good? 'Cos'e they's good 'n' so's this heah money, dad fetch it! None better, ole Jerry himsef says, 'n' he orter know.

"He's wukked a sight o'time fo' the Govamint a-makin' this money—most wore his eyes out, he has, carvin' them steel dies—'n' I jis' s'pose the Govamint hain't powerful proud 'n' mighty obleeged, too, fo' all what he's gone 'n' done! Is this money good, yo' granny! Hang it, why do yo' lay to ast sich kustions?"

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The Frisco Kid was fairly browbeaten.

"Oh, nothin'," he returned evasively. "Only I've heard tell of phoney grifters what tried to shill off bum change and got time for it in stir, too, when they was nabbed. Seein' so much money kinder knocked the daylights out of me, and made me plumb suspicious. It's all come of me hobnobbin' with boes and yeggs, I guess."

"I ain't never met up before with a man, like old Jerry, what makes money for the Govamint. But old Jerry, now, he must be a pretty big gee in these parts, makin' money for the Govermint, and makin' heaps of it besides, I guess, pedlin' that phoney stuff to the shines 'round here."

"Sho' he is," agreed the little fellow. "And he's tighter'n a Thanksgivin' turkey with his—Jiminy crickets! heah's some moah o' the stuff!"

Gamaliel, in pulling off the other legging, had shaken out of it, from between the lining and the leather, another dozen new crisp bank-notes.

"Dog my cats!" he exclaimed. "Heah we've got all of twenty er fifty fi-dollah bills. Most a thousan' dollahs, neahly. Le's skedaddle fo' Perkins like ole Jerry hissef war arter us, 'n' buy all kinds o' cakes 'n' candies befo' ole Jerry cayn fin' us!"

"Ye're on!" said the Kid grimly. "We'll give Jerry a bit of his own med'cine for tryin' to steal my dog and for bein' so tight and stingy with yer."

Gamaliel danced about.

"Oh, won't he be all ovah mad 'n' bilin', though! He'll wanta chaw me up! And it'll be nuts for the ole rapscallion. He'll larrup me to mush!"

The Frisco Kid looked at the little fellow rather sadly, even as though a bit hurt.

"No, he won't. Don't yer worry, he won't harm yer none, the old blind phoney stiff—not if I knows it!"

Gamaliel stopped dancing. He drew near the Frisco Kid and caught his hand. And he looked up at the Kid out of his clear blue eyes that were big and very round with unstinted admiration.

"Yo' sho' tuck the starch outer ole Jerry las' evenin', bo, all right! He jis' couldn't 'pear to git ovah it er fohgit it, nohow. All this heah mawnin', he kep' lookin' back 'n' listenin', a-skeered yo' war comin'. I raiken ole Jerry won't whale me no moah ag'in, now—rot him!"

The Frisco Kid was stuffing the bank-notes back into the leggings.

"Come on," he said hastily, feeling suddenly very big and very good. "I'm so hungry and holler inside, I could eat a dead cat!" And he smiled down at the little fellow.

The little fellow smiled up at him. The Kid took the dusty leggings under one arm. Then followed by the Gay-Cat, trailing the long length of hay-rope, his stump of a tail still wagging with happiness, the Frisco Kid and Gamaliel, holding hands like the children that they were, made along the winding white road.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE VILLAGE OF PERKINS LANDING

THEY rounded that hill which once had been a bluff overlooking the Mississippi and came, under the lee of it, upon the little hamlet of Perkins Landing. It consisted of a number of widely separated houses straggling on either side of the road. Before each house stood some sort of tree and beneath each tree there appeared to slouch some sort of man.

Back from the road, on one side, they came upon a semicircle of poplar-trees. Beneath the trees were a couple of rustic benches upon which half a dozen men sat. The most of them had canes, while one or two wore battered Army service hats.

Just beyond the semicircle of trees a road branched off from the main artery toward the river—a road which must have been built since the river swerved away from Perkins Landing and which had been constructed to all appearances, by private enterprise; for swinging across the road was a white toll-gate.

At the junction of the two roads stood a trim solid-looking house, a story and a half in height, made of brick and cobble, with two white windows in front and, over the door in the sloping red-shingled roof, a small dormer window from which swung a sign labeled—

"Perkins Toll-House, Post-Office and Gen'l Merchandise Store."

Toward this building, the boys made.

As they did, a man came out of the toll-house—a small, old, straggly-whiskered man with a sightless left eye, sunken and lidded, and one very bright ferocious eye. He crossed the road, thumping heavy and

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solid on the heels of his high boots. The old men under the trees seemed to liven at his approach and the two in the service hats saluted, hands to brim.

"Evenin' Capting."

"Howdy, Ebenezer."

"What's the latest news in the *Weekly Chelmsford Mississippi Bugle?*"

"Wal, Jedge Dickinson," the ferocious-looking new arrival returned to the last speaker, "I see by the papah thet Hank Glover's half-sister, Angela, wah unite in holy wedlock las' Thusday night with Jarge Rutherfo'd, the overseer o' Kunnel Chel'sfo'd's plantations.

"An' Missus Chel'sfo'd wah at the chu'ch in the fust light-cullahed dress she's wore sence hern baby-gal wah lost, er stoled as the story has it. She looked reely han'some the papah says, only kind o' saddish, Missus Chel'sfo'd.

"An' Dunc' Jenks, he's got his app'intment approved from Woshington as the Deputy Revenuer daown thisaways. Ole Dunc', I raiken he'll be all swelled an' uppish naow—put on a power o' side an' try to lay it all ovah us, same as ef he *wah* same somebody. But holy Moses, he needn't tuck on, enny. Warn't I, Ebenezer Tuttle, the Deputy Revenuer h'yer'bouts, back f'o year ago, whin Kunnel Chel'sfo'd wah Revenuer Agent fo' the hull Fed'ral deestrick?"

Gamaliel, the Kid and the leashed dog went across the road. Entering the store, they found themselves between two long counters heaped up with a disarray of notions, food-stuffs and hardware.

There were shoelaces and boxes of hairpins upon a round of cheese; there were sewing articles in the same glass case with a number of home-made pies; while from the box-laden shelves on the walls hung crinkly new gingham and calico frocks, starchy sunbonnets and straw hats, large and round as gigantic mushrooms.

Near the doorway was a raised portion of counter, grilled and marked "Post-Office." Behind the grille work, a white-haired sweet-faced old woman sat knitting. She hopped up at the boys' entrance and shoved her horn-rimmed spectacles up upon her furrowed forehead, her little eyes sparkling.

"Laws-a-mercy!" she exclaimed. "H'yer am strangers shore, sez I, the moment I clapped eyes on yeo'. An' this leetle fellah h'yer—ain't he the cutest leetle chap an' all dyked out regar'less! Laws-a-me, how I wish my Ebenezer mought see yo'! My Ebenezer, he's a case, that man. Allus moseyin'acrost the road, he is, to that powwowo' ole uns ovah thar at Lee Circle. No head fo' bizness at all, but shore the longest head fo' memorization I evah struck.

"I of'n sez, sez I 'Ebenezer, yo' shore missed yo' vocation, man. Yo' sartinly would huv made the primest sma'test parson, suh'. He cayn read the papah an' repeat it all jist like a singin' lesson. An' the Good Book—lan', he knows that from kiver to kiver!

"But deary me," she broke off, with a sheepish little smile, "h'yer I am a-runnin' on an' on regar'less, an' yo' pore leetle uns jist plumb tuckered out an' most-like starvin' right beneath my eyes. What did yo'-all 'low yo'd like, naow?"

But the purchase proved a matter of some moment. The Frisco Kid selected a creamy-yellow custard pie and a great round frosted cake fairly oozing red juice and strawberries, and then Gamaliel pointed out with a dirty greedy finger, any number of "all-day suckers," "jaw-breakers" and "hot roasted Southern peanuts." A bit fearfully, the Kid tendered in payment one of the five-dollar bills.

The old woman lowered the spectacles over her eyes and very circumspectly examined the greenback. Then she nodded, went behind the grilled "Post-Office" and from a drawer extracted a woolen sack, swelled and jingling with money.

"My golly smoke, yo' got a sight o' money!" ejaculated Gamaliel, his sugar-coated lips smacking together. "I raiken now—I raiken yo' could cash twenty sich fi'-dollah bills er—er fifty, huh?"

The old woman beamed.

"Law bless yo', yes!" she returned quite proudly. "I 'low we has got consid'able money nowáday. Most all the darkies h'yer'bouts, they bank thar money h'yer. Some new law o' the Govamint, my Ebenezer sez, what makes pos'-offices plain ornery savin's-banks.

"I 'clar to glory, thar's no stannin' these h'yer darkies. Yo' jist watch an' see. Pooty soon one uv 'em 'll be tryin' to be Prisident, shore's yo're born!"

She counted out the change and the boys, pocketing it and with effort gathering up in their arms the many purchases, left the store, recrossed the road and seated themselves with their backs against two of the poplars of the Circle.

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They ate pie and candy, cake and peanuts indiscriminately and, as indiscriminately, threw bits of it to the dog. Behind them, as they munched, the old men still were talking. In the warm listless afternoon, the talk sounded monotonous, drowsy, like the heavy droning of bees.

"Wal, I see'd by the *Bugle*," the one-eyed Ebenezer was saying, "thet a cullahed buck daown the taownship way wah was conwicted uv makin' moonshine. He had a cabin 'mongst the vines an' sassafras o' Baggerly Islan'. An' the papah says he done fixed up the ole still what Sol Baggerly himsef used fo' year agone, and what Kunnel Chel'sfo'd done busted all to pieces thet time he wah Revenuer Agent."

"I reckerlec' the time, 'Nezer. But what war the black's name?"

"He wah named Fayette Williams—he's some sort o' far-off relative o' Scheeherazadee Williams, Dunc' Jenks' scullery wench. An' she wah daown fo' to see the wuthless lot, an' whin she wah in the store this-yer mawnin', she wah bitter as' simmons on the kunnel. Said he wah puttin' his fingah inter everybody's pie an' thet he kerlected all the evidence——"

"But Chelmsford's not a Revenuer any mo'."

"I knows; I knows thet, Jedge Dickson. But thish-yer Williams gal, she says as how the kunnel's naow in the Secret Sarvice——"

"Secret Sarvice yore granny! I 'low we don't need no Secret Sarvice daown heah, an' what's moah, Capting Tuttle, I 'low Kunnel Chel'fo'd hain't nohow the kinda man to jine up with sech a hidin'-out sneakin' sorta outfit."

"Right yo' air, Zeke. Thar hain't a better man this side Orleans, I cal'late, than the kunnel. Looky what he done fo' the nigger chillen daown the Taownship-way, 'nd the yunkers o' the pore whites——"

"But 'twah sho' a cryin' shame the way ol' Solermun Baggerly done sarved him," interposed another. "I allus held an' I allus will hold thet 'twah ol' Sol what done tuk his leetle Celestie, arter the kunnel had bruk up his still an' shoved him neck an' crop outer the country. An' thet's the low-down why the kunnel done raired up thet school—outer sad an' sorrerful memory uv his baby-gurl——"

The boys slept. Surfeited with all they had eaten, their heads had tilted farther and farther forward until at last, with a final sag, their chins had rested on their chests and they were asleep.

Even the Gay-Cat was asleep, lying coiled and yellow in the sun between them, the hay-rope from his neck held loosely in the Kid's hand. Once he roused to lift his sharp yellow head and to look about him querulously.

But that which had disturbed him proved only to be the old men marching off along the road, their gossip and arguments left to be continued the following day. The dog yawned, licked his candy-sticky chops, slid his head between his forepaws and then again to all appearances, he was dead to the world.

THE grind of wheels on the dust of the road and the sound of a man urging on a horse awoke the boys and dog. It was dusk. In the diffused light of the gloaming, the whole world seemed wrapped in a gold-sprayed dust that made everything, near and far away, very vague and beautiful—the white road, the reach of trees on either hand, and the brick-and-cobble toll-house opposite, with its sign-board creaking and its white-framed windows glistening in the last rays of the sun.

The boys sat up and guiltily rubbed their eyes. The dog yawned and looked questioningly and a trifle impatiently at them. The sound of grinding wheels and heavy hoof-beats neared, and a man jogged into view on a two-wheeled cart drawn by a grotesquely ponderous horse with long hair on its fetlocks.

He was the lanky bewhiskered fellow of the jeans and straw hat whom the Kid had spoken to early that afternoon. At sight of the boys, he jerked the ponderous horse to a standstill.

"By jings!" he ejaculated, "h'yer air yo' two got together! And th' dorg along, too! By Jeber Socks! ef thet hain't th' bangest thing evah!"

He looked at them sharply, a growing suspicion in his eyes.

"Say, yunkers," he called out, after a moment, "whar did yo'-all git thet custard pie yo've part et, 'nd thet candy whose wrappin's is lyin' all about?"

At the man's inquisitiveness, the Kid remembered, all at once, the fellow's suspicion of the greenback that afternoon. He motioned Gamaliel to remain quiet. But

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Gamaliel seemed filled with a sudden pride.

"Why, we bo't it. We had a greenback, jist like the one I guv yo'," he rejoined, "an' yo' betcher, too, we got plenty moah!"

Whereat he reached into the chaps under the Kid's arms, ere the Kid with a greater caution lent by experience and fear could stop him, withdrew from between the lining and the leather a fistful of bills.

The man's eyes fairly bulged. He took off his hat and scratched his bald head in deep perplexity. Then from a pocket of his jeans, he drew out the five-dollar bill Gamaliel had given him for the dog that morning. He eyed it as though with a strengthened suspicion, and looked from it to the bills in the boy's hand.

Suddenly he spat neatly between the horse's ears and said, ingratiatingly:

"Waal, yunkers, I'm gwine into Chel'sfo'd Township 'nd I'll give yo' a lift. I would 'a' ben thar by now on'y Allee Baabar h'yer, he cast a shoe three mile down th' road, 'nd I had to turn back home 'nd make a new un 'nd put it on mysef. But thet's no nevah mind. I'll give yo' a lift to th' Township, ef yo' say. Want a lift?"

The boys looked at each other. Presently Gamaliel shook his sombreroed head vigorously, a kind of fear in his round blue eyes.

"No," he said, suddenly subdued. "We'd like to ride with yo' like everythin', but we cayn't. Jerry Mears, the ole rapscallion, he's ahead along the road som'eres, 'n' he'd ketch us. We don't want fo' to meet him at all, no moah."

The man nodded, spit, and scratched his head again.

"By jings, I'll tell yo' what yo' do," he said at last. "Yo' is gwine to hang around h'yer a spell, eh? Waal, yo'-all go down to my house at the fo'k o' th' road ternight, 'nd stay tell mawnin'. Tell' em Dunc' Jenks, th' new Depooty Revenuer—thet's me—sint yo'. I'll be back 'long toward midnight, I cal'late."

"All right," said the Frisco Kid.

"Thet'll be candy fo' us," agreed Gamaliel.

Both were so happy at receiving promise of shelter for the night that, with childish innocence, they never thought to question the motive actuating the man's offer. They did not realize that he wanted them to stay overnight in his house in order that he might be able to lay hands on them forthwith, should the greenback he had received prove spurious.

Quickly the night darkened. A reflecting kerosene lamp was lighted in the tollhouse and the light streamed out of the two lower windows and open door, and lay across the road like the three white fingers of a mangled hand. The bats came out and flew back and forth across the lighted spaces in a bewildering game of tag.

The boys could see the old man leaning against one counter, an old brown fiddle beneath his chin. He drew the bow tentatively once or twice across the strings, and then began playing and singing, and tapping time with his foot:

She's my Juliana Feebiana Concertina Brown,
She am the prettiest gal was evah in the taown.
She has eyes so bright an' feet so nice——
She wears a numbah nine——
She am the fairest queen uv all along the line!

And then, as they lay there, heads nodding to the melody, they heard the sound. It was a dull sound in all that soft music of fiddling and singing; yet was it a distinct, staccato and strangely familiar sound—*tap, tap, tap!*

CHAPTER VII

"AN' YO' HAIN'T GWYNE-A LEAVE ME NEVAH NO MOAH?"

THE dog scrambled afoot, trembling nervously in every leg. Gamaliel scrambled afoot. He was in a panic of dread. He was about to run away when the Kid said:

"What yer 'fraid of, Gay-May? It's only the blind phoney man a-stompin' along on his stick. He won't hurt yer none. Yer jes' stay here by me. I'll fix him for stealin' my dog!"

There was more than threat in the Frisco Kid's voice. In the Frisco Kid's voice was a mighty tone of bravado. Before the little frightened boy, he felt very big and very strong then.

The blind man's seedy stoop-shouldered form took shape in the night. His large silver-rimmed glasses, outstanding and peering, glimmered in the light from the tollhouse. As though guided by some random sound of their whispers, he headed straight for the poplar tree beneath which the boys

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waited. He asked in his singsongy whine—

"Is thet yo', Gamaliel?"

"Yes, Jerry," the little fellow answered tremblingly; then added, in a brave afterthought, "Sho', yo' ornery ole piruț!"

Mears said no more. He came on, a quiet smile on his lean brown face. He got quite close to the boy. It was shocking, then, that vehement change which swept over him. Unexpected and nimble as quicksilver, he reached out one lean bony hand, and caught the boy by the shoulder, and raised over his head the heavy knobby stick.

"Yo' thankless little runt!" he said, "I'll larn yo' to keep me waitin'!"

The stick descended, but the Frisco Kid, leaping in, caught it on an interposing arm.

"No, yer don't!" he cried. "You drop that stick! There ain't gonna be no beatin' of kids 'round here, not while I knows it!"

The phoney man stepped back, shocked, chagrined, and terribly angered.

"Yo' heah? Yo' heah, yo' measly dod-rotted bum!"

He whirled on the Kid. But abruptly all his surprise and anger fled. He lowered the stick and hiding his chagrin, became all at once whining and conciliating.

"Why, good evenin', bo, evenin', to yo'. Ole Jerry nevah 'spected yo' wuz heah, he nevah 'spected yo'd be heah nohow. Shore, yo' must be some tall walker, bo! Ten mile hain't nuthin' fo' yo' to traipse, I raiken, now. En thet cute little yaller dorg o' yourn, he's heah, too, heh?"

He felt about with his stick very quickly until he touched the dog. The Gay-Cat growled.

"Yeah!" he chortled. "So thar yo' be, yo' elegan' little animule! En I cal'late now, yo' is quite put out, bo, 'bout losin' yo' precious yaller houn'. But I didn't mean fo' to hive him fo' keeps; hones', I didn't. As shore's my name's ole Jerry Mears, I on'y cal'lated to keep him jist long enough to fetch a little money.

"En we done hit, bo; we made a sight o' money, thet pert little articule en the ole blin' man. I'll han' some ovah to yo', wunse we fetch thet shanty-boat; a elegan' new greenback—think o' thet, bo—all fo' yo'sef!"

The Frisco Kid, while a whit appeased by the man's excuses and promises, still harbored resentment enough to feel a joy in contradicting him.

"I can't see where yer made any money on my dog," he said sullenly. "Them darkies said yer paid back more for Gay-Cat than they gave yer first, and so did Dunc' Jenks, the revenuer, what I met this afternoon and who passed along the road not more'n an hour ago."

The blind man chuckled. He peered at the Frisco Kid through his glasses, as though nonplused; yet he continued to chuckle. At last he whined:

"Me make money off'n yo' dorg! Dingnations, lad, hain't yo' nevah figgered ole Jerry wuz on'y a-foolin' uv yo', a-foolin' uv yo' all the time, now en afore? Thet's why I tuck the dorg in the fust place. Says I, this smart little feller, he thinks a precious lot uv thet cute yaller dorg.

"I'll tuck the little animule along, jist to fin' out how fon' he is o' him en jist to fool him a middlin' bit. En I done hit, bo," he cackled, "I fooled yo' all holler! But now thet the dorg's back en we're all reunited in one bosom fambly, as the Good Book says, why everythin's jist gaudy en elegan'-like, I raiken— yeah?"

The Frisco Kid said no word. Only, with grave suspicion, he watched the man.

Using the stick as a support, his other hand sliding down the bole of a poplar tree, Jerry Mears sat down. He sat down full upon the partly eaten custard pie. He leaped up. Swearing a blue streak, his thin hawk-like face convulsed with anger, his left hand frantically brushing the custard from the swallow-tails of his coat, he cried:

"Dang all creation! What's this? Custard—custard pie!"

The discovery of the exact cause of his discomfiture wrought a sudden change in the man.

"Custard pie, heh? Ben havin' a feast, no doubt; yeah, a sumchous feast, all gran' gaudy to behold. But won't yo' tell the ole blin' phoney man whah yo' done fetched the money to pu'chase sich a elegan' repast?"—he appealed to the Frisco Kid—"I's jist perishin' to know, bo!"

He appeared worried and a bit nervous. The Kid eyed him and sought for an answer. Suddenly Gamaliel, holding to the Kid's hand, began sobbing brokenly.

"Thar now, Gamaliel, thet's a good little feller. Yo' tell ole Jerry; yo' tell yo' ole man jist whar yo' got all that money."

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"Aw," sobbed Gamaliel, despite the Kid's cautioning pressure on his hand—"aw, we found a bunch o' greenbacks, all o' fifty o' them in my leggin's, an'——"

"Found them in yo' leggin's!" repeated Mears, reaching for the chaps and wheezing with excitement. The Kid gave the chaps over into his keeping, and he thrust a hand within one and discovered, between the leather and the lining, the many bills.

"Dad fetch thet Ole Woman!" he said in an undertone. "So thet's what she meant a-tellin' me to tuck off his leggin's. These heah greenbacks in his leggin's! En I nevah knowed! I's come all this way back, en it hain't one tolerable bit safe fo' me to 'pear round thisaways so soon. Dern the Ole Woman fo' a muggins! Why couldn't she speak out straight, consarn her!"

He was truly nervous now.

"Chillen," he said unctuously, "whar did yo'-all cash thet greenback?"

"In the post-office acrost the road," returned the Frisco Kid desperately.

"An' she cayn cash all kinds o' greenbacks, Jerry," said Gamaliel. "She's got heaps o' money, all jinglin' 'n' tied up in a ole woolen sock. All the darkies heah'-bouts, they bank thar money with her. Say, why don't yo' try her, Jerry?"

Gamaliel spoke in a manner which indicated that he had been instructed to look for logical places to cash greenbacks.

MEARS turned and, his head on one side, peered across the road. The light from the toll-house flashed upon the tarnished rims of his glasses, and pulsed and dulled on the lenses. For a space no word was said. Within the toll-house, they could see the old man fiddling, and the sound of his voice drifted, clearly distinct, to the three on the shadowy road:

Sum folks say thet a niggah don' steal—
An' I'm gwyne-a git a home bimeby;
But I cotched two in my cornfield—
An' I'm gwyne-a git a home bimeby.
One had a shovel an' one had a hoe—
An' I'm gwyne-a git a home bimeby;
Sho', ef thet ain't stealin', wal I don' know—
An' I'm gwyne-a git a home bimeby!

Oh, thet watahmelon,
Lan' o' goodness, yo' mus' die!
Fo' I'm gwyne-a jine the contraband chillen,
An' I'm gwyne-a git a home bimeby."

Very quietly and carefully, the blind man at down. He asked—

"Whar does she keep hern money?"

"In a drawer," answered Gamaliel glibly and guilelessly. "She's got a high ole desk in thar neah the door, what is marked 'Pos'-Office,' 'n' she keeps all that money, a powerful sight o' it, in a drawer uv thet ole desk."

The blind man nodded.

"En did yo' see ennythin' o' a malickous weapon 'round abouts, ennythin' like a gun, now?"

"Shucks! Hain't thet jist like yo', Jerry Mears! Alluz askin' has they got a gun, er a colluhed sarvant mebbe! But my golly smoke, I lay she don't need no gun! She 'n' hern ole man with the shiny eye——"

"Thar's a ole man along, too? Dang it, why didn't yo' tell me thar wuz two uv 'em!"

"Wul, I would 'av, I raiken, ef yo'd 'a' guv me a chanst. Cos thar's two o' them, her 'n' Ebenezer, a ole white-haired dried-up kind o' little feller, what should 'a' bin a preachin', paslm-singin' one-eyed pahson—she done tole us so hernsef. Thet's him ovah thar, a-fiddlin' away 'n' a-singin' like all glory. An' they is the best-naturedest souls——"

"Yeah? Good-natured they be, heh? En mought 'a' ben a pahson, too!"

The blind man nodded his head several times, very slowly. He seemed to be pondering. Presently, he looked up at the sky where the stars were just beginning to peep out. He said, apropos of nothing—

"Thar'll be no moon ternight."

Suddenly he bent over, pressing his stomach and grimacing.

"Law, I's powerful hungry. My innards is all scrunched up en I's hungry as a hawg. By Zachariah, I raiken I'll go ovah thar to thet toll-house en pu'chase a supper. What say, heh?"

He looked quizzically through his glasses at the boys and there was about him then a terrifying resemblance to some great bird of prey.

Gamaliel assented readily. But there was that in all the questions and answers which filled the Frisco Kid with vague misgivings.

"I guess I don't need no supper," he said. "Gay-Cat and me, we's plumb stuffed up with all that sweet truck we et today. I think we'll be moseyin' along. We'll go back, me and Gay-Cat, to Dunc' Jenks's place for the night."

The blind man said nothing, only turned his head to one side to hide the sudden smile

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that wrinkled his lean hawk-like face. Not so Gamaliel. He sidled over to the Kid's side, and took his hand, and looked up at him out of great round blue eyes.

"Yo' hain't gwyne to leave me, is yo'? Jist come along, 'n' yo' don't have to eat no moah 'n me—I'm tighter'n a Thanksgivin' turkey mysef."

But the Kid shook his head.

"I'm skeered if yo' go away," pleaded Gamaliel, dropping his voice to a whisper and looking fearfully at the smiling blind man. "I'm skeered ole Jerry'll tan me. He hain't forguv me none fo' spendin' thet greenback. He'll lash the livers 'n' lights out'n me." His tiny hand trembled in the Kid's hand.

The Kid could not resist that trembling hand, that pleading voice. A heritage of dreadful memories rose in his mind, memories of the beatings he himself had received at the hands of Frisco Red. He said quietly:

"I'll go, Gay-May. Come on."

But Gamaliel held back.

"An' yo' hain't gwyne-a leave me nevah no moah, bo—not fo' love o' money?"

The Kid looked down at him. He nodded—he could not speak.

Behind them, very silently, the blind man had got afoot.

"Yo' leave the dorg behind, bo," he said querulously, as though somehow vexed.

The boys swung about, startled at the suddenness and sharpness of his voice.

"Not that I hain't tuck consid'able to thet pert little animule, as I done said," he went on, his voice quickly becoming wheedling again; "but dorgs is dorgs, en sometimes they git 'nation pesky, alwuz about. Yo' tie him to a tree. He's had a-plenty to eat this evenin', I raiken." And he cackled hollowly.

Obediently the Frisco Kid did as he was bidden. The length of hay-rope served to make the Gay-Cat fast to one of the poplar trees. Then the Kid and Gamaliel leading the way, the blind man tapping behind them, the chaparejos under one arm, an enigmatic smile upon his shrewd lean face, they started for the lighted store where, once again, the old man had launched into the sprightly chorus:

Oh, I feel jist as happy as a big sunflower
Thet nods an' bends in the bree-zes,
An' my heart's jist as light as the winds thet blow——
Thet blow among the tree-zes!"

CHAPTER VIII

A LODGING FOR THE NIGHT

THE weazened old man, with the one ferocious eye, lifted his chin from the fiddle.

"Evenin', neighbor, evenin' to you," began Jerry Mears in his singsongy voice, his blurred eyes blinking in the lamplight behind the outstanding glasses. "The ole man cayn't see so elegan'-like, but he cayn listen right pert. He hearn yo' fiddlin' an singin' when he wuz back the road a piece. Shaw! thet moosic done drawed him on, like the sweet singin' o' David done the giant, Goliar, as the Good Book says."

"Good even' to yo', suh," returned the ferocious-eyed fellow. "Good evenin' to yo', an' thrice welcome yo' be, jedgin' as I do from yo' talk thet yo' be a man o' sound Christian larnin' an' principul."

"Yeah, sta'wart Christians we be," said Mears—"sta'wart Christians thet has walked a consid'able long ways, this day through a most heathenish country. Sence break o' day, thar wuz nevah a good Samaritan, as the Fo'th Chaptah o' Genesis has hit, to give us a lift er a bite o' somethin'.

"Jidge, we'se powerful hungry. Yo' couldn't set us down to a smack, now could yo'? Law bress yo', I'll pay fo' hit. I've got a bit o' money myself, en food is wuth good money enny day, I cal'late, en menny thanks."

From the chaps under his left arm, he tendered to the old man, with the words, a crisp new bank-note. With Southern instinct for courtesy and hospitality, the old man refused to accept the money. But the blind man, as if with some premeditated object, insisted upon paying then and there.

"Yore a man arter my own heart, Jidge," he smirked; "but jist the same, right is right, en the ole blin' man must be said en led by the principuls thet has shaped his life all these year. Pay fust en eat arterwards, thet's my principuls."

"Ef I git to glory, them's noble sentermints!" exclaimed Ebenezer, capitulating. "But jist the same, thar would 'a' bin a-plenty o' time fo' yo' to pay, arter yo'-all had eaten yore fill."

He took the five-dollar bill and made for the "Post-Office" at the entrance of the store.

"But speakin' o' principuls," he continued

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in a manner indicative of giving a confidence—"speakin' o' principuls, I must tell yo', on principuls, thet I hain't a jedge in these parts at all. I fo't ag'in Geronimo, whar I los' my lef' eye, in my young sinful days way back in the eighties, an' some folks has come to call me capting, knowin' next to nothin' 'bout the Sarvice.

"I wah on'y a toler'ble pore corp'ral, but they calls me thet, Capting Tuttle. Folks do have a power o' respect fo' me daown thish-aways," he ended guilelessly.

The blind man's thin shrewd face lighted up. There had come, from the direction of the "Post-Office," the slither of a drawer being pulled out, and then the jingle of money as the old man, to make change, lifted in his hands the woolen sock.

Mears remained as he was, facing the rear of the store; but his head was half turned 'round and his body all hunched over to one side, his face smiling quietly the while.

Ebenezer, coming back, counted into the blind man's bony hand nine silver half dollars. As Mears murmured an obsequious, "Thankee, Captin'," the old man said—

"Come thish-yer ways."

He then led the queer trio into a tiny cubby at the back of the store which served, from appearances, as kitchen and dining-room in one.

It was scrupulously clean. A large squat stove seemed to take up most of its area and there was, against one wall, a table covered with a blue-patterned oil-cloth. At one end of the table stood a kerosene-lamp, by the feeble light of which the sweet-faced old woman was darning socks. She dropped her work as the door from the store opened and, shoving her horn-rimmed spectacles up on her wrinkled forehead, peered at the newcomers.

"Goodness-gracious-sakes-alive!" she ejaculated, her little sparkling eyes alighting on Gamaliel and the Frisco Kid. "Ef h'yer an't them stranger tads I wah tellin' yo' 'bout, 'Nezer. An' this leetle chap h'yer—ain't he a case though, with all his trappin's an' blue eyes!"

"Yo' mean, Susannah—my kingdom! yo' mean them yunkers what wah in h'yer terday pu'chasin' sweets?"

He looked in bewilderment from his wife to the blind man.

The blind man drew his thin lower lip in between his teeth and a sudden press of blood darkened the brown of his face. Then slowly a forced smile loosened the stiffness of his face and he released his lip, which was savagely red.

"Yo' raikened correckly, Jidge—pahdon the ole man, I mean Captin'. Yo' know I cayn't hep callin' yo' jidge, yo' look en ack so 'nation ven'rable en religjus. But as I wuz sayin—Law! now jist what wuz I sayin'? Oh, yeah, yeah; 'bout eatin', warn't hit?

"Wal, as I wuz sayin', my boys come in heah terday to buy some candy en sich-like truck, en as they wuz gwyne back along the road to meet thar ole man, lo en behold! heah wuz a little du'ty-face' chile, a-cryin' en a-blatterin' like no slouch, I tell yo'. They guv hit a piece o' candy, en it kind o' laid off bawlin' a spell, en up en tole them hits mothah wuz sick——"

"Sick?" repeated the old woman, straightening up from busying about the stove. "Laws-a-me, thet mus' be Missus Rawlins what hain't been feelin' well these menny-a-day. Whar did yo'-all meet the leetle un? 'Roun t'other side o' the hill?"

"Yeah, 'round t'other side o' the hill," agreed the blind man with astonishing quickness. "Missus Rawlins' little gurl—warn't hit a gurl, Gamaliel?"

"Lan' sake, it must 'a' ben a g'yirl," interposed the old woman ere Gamaliel could aid out in the falsehood. "Missus Rawlins, she's got fi' childern, all g'yirls—the pore thing!"

"Wal, hern little du'ty-face' gurl——"

"Thet'll be Hanner, she's allus dirty, of co's'e."

"Wal, Hanner, she done tole the boys thet she en hern fo' sisters, they hadn't nuthin' to eat all day. So what does my boys do but up en guv 'em all thet candy en pie, en the pore boys jist pinin' hungry themsefs at the time——"

"Oh, the darlin' leetle critturs!" burst from the old lady and, for a moment, it looked as if she would hug both little hoboes to her bosom. "But set daown, set daown," she added hastily. "H'yer I am a-runnin' on an' on, an' yo' two leettle chaps jist plumb tuckered out and most-like starvin' right beneath my eyes. Set daown an' have a bite."

With marvelous celerity, the old woman put upon the table a crockery pitcher brimming with rich thick milk, a bowl of brown sugar, a small jug of molasses, heaping platters of corn-pone and hoe-cake, and colorful

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bowls of prune and peach jam, and crabapple jelly.

All the time she had been talking, she had been busying about the stove from which now arose the smell of catfish sizzling in butter. Quickly but thoroughly she warmed over, in the oven, a huckleberry and a pumpkin pie, some chicken and a number of sweet potatoes. Then serving steaming fragrant coffee to Jerry and large mugs of milk to the boys, she set the repast before them, with the delicious addition of some blackberries and cream.

"What a mouth-waterin' gaudy dinnah!" the blind man could not refrain from remarking as the odors tickled his nostrils.

There was in his voice, for the first time that evening, a positive ring of sincerity.

"All raired up in thish-yer county," said the old man with a justifiable pride.

NOW, it is a precept, an irrefragable law of conduct among hoboes, never to pass up a meal.

"Swallow it down if it busts you," is the commandment; "you never can tell when you'll get another."

And this was more than a meal; it was wholesome fare, appetizing fare, such fare as would tingle the palate of even an epicure, a sybarite. Yet the Frisco Kid felt no urge of appetite at all.

It was not alone because he had gorged himself with sweets that afternoon; there was filling his mind vague misgivings regarding the blind man's purpose and, somehow, those misgivings had communicated to the pit of his stomach a rather sick feeling. He could not eat.

Not so Gamaliel, however. As if in truth he had not eaten all day, as if violently hungry, he no sooner sighted the juicy hot pies, smoking chicken, jams and molasses and milk than he started in, with dirty greedy fingers, to help himself. But with one claw-like hand outreaching across the table, the blind man halted him, doffed his shapeless black hat, bowed his head, and reverently said grace.

"Deah Lawd," he prayed, "fo' thet which we air now about to receive en partake uv, heah below, en all out'n Thy bounty en good-naturedness o' heart, we do 'umbly thank Yo', good Lawd."

"Amen," ended the old couple in one voice. They were visibly impressed.

Mears cut into the snow-white meat of the catfish, smeared some crabapple jelly on the sweet potatoes, dabbed a chunk of cornpone with molasses, and began eating voraciously.

"Man alive, what a good fry this heah cadfish done make!"

Ebenezer opened and closed his single good eye in ready agreement.

"Ketched it mysef thish-yer mawnin', I did," he said. "An' thet reminds me—holy Moses, I'd most fo'gotten! But it wah whilst I wah fishin' fo' thet cadfish off'n Milkens' Wharf thet along come Long John Rawlins, the same whose wife am now tuck daown sick.

"An' he up an' tells me that whin he wah out midstream, yisterday noontide, brungin' in some logs to the mill, thar as shore as he wah born, he see'd a mermaid sunnin' hersef on a log! Yes-sir-ee, a mermaid with golden ha'r fallin' daown to her waist, an' big sad eyes, an' the whitest kind o' skin, an' a awful fishy tail beneath! Ef I gits to glory, hain't thet the bangest thing evah?"

"I believe hit," replied the blind man, nodding emphatically to the quick accompaniment of his munching jaws. "Some folks, they don't lay thar is mermaids no moah, but I's not one o' them kind. Mermaids thar be, some sinful creeturs en some as big-naturedes' as the Lawd A'mighty himsef. Don't the Good Book tell o' mermaids?"

He paused for effect. The Frisco Kid sat gloomy and pensive, eyeing him questioninly, regretfully, over his mug of milk. It did not escape him how oily and fawning was the blind man's tone, how eagerly he concurred in everything the old folk said, no matter how absurd; and the misgivings assailing his mind strengthened almost to the point of conviction.

"Yeah, the Good Book tells o' mermaids, a heap o' times. Thar wuz Moses what wuz chattin' with the bullfrogs in the willers whin he wuz foun' by some mermaids. By Zachariah, it wuz one o' the good mermaids foun' him, a han'some beautjus mermaid, the darter o' a queen, the Queen o' Sheba hernsef, the Good Book says.

"En 'twixt yo' en me, I raiken Moses, he larned a trick er two from thet mermaid. How else do yo' su'pose he could traipse so easy-like acrost the Red Sea en all them 'Gyptians be drownded, neck en crop? How else, I ask yo' thet?"

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The blind man paused to lift his blurred bespectacled eyes and to look about him very triumphantly. Suddenly his eyes halted in sweeping about and peered straight ahead at the wall opposite. It was as if some bright object on that wall had flashed a vision to his retina through the dimness of the crystalline lenses of his eyes.

Said Mears suddenly—

"I see yo' got a gun thar on the wall."

The Frisco Kid from making a pretense of sipping his milk, followed the direction of the phoney man's riveted gaze. There on the opposite wall, its short, well-kept, polished steel barrel scintillating like star-stuff in the lamplight, was an old-fashioned Springfield rifle.

"Oh, yes, we got a gun, sech as it is," the old man chuckled softly. "Susannah h'yer is afeared to 'low me load it. So thar, empty an' useless, it hangs as a keepsake an' ha'ntin' reminder o' my un-Christian days in the Injun wars.

"But leastways, ef I wah put to it, Susannah says, one sight o' it in my han's would be fitten to keel a evildoer ovah, knock the starch plumb outer him."

Mears put down the chicken leg and wiped his brow with a cotton handkerchief.

"'Deed en 'deed!" he cackled. "I 'low yo' ole woman is puffeckly correck. Thar's no manner o' sense er use in havin' a vicious weapon lyin' 'bout, loaded, in a hones' Christian's house."

It may have been the odor of food in surfeited nostrils which sickened the Frisco Kid; it may have been the grimly suggestive turn to the conversation; but in either case, the squeamish feeling at the pit of the Kid's stomach became so poignantly distressing that he rose, now, to his feet.

At the sound of the scraping chair, the blind man jerked up his head sharply.

"Whar now, bo?"

"Only outside, Jerry. I feel kinder sick —and I wanter see if Gay-Cat's all right and—and if the moon has come out."

The fresh earthly-fragrant air, breathing on the Kid's warm temples and into his lungs, quickly allayed the sick heaving of his stomach. Across the road his dog whined with loneliness, while out in the wide star-coruscating night, a watch of crickets stridulated remote and eerily.

At sight of the Kid in the lighted doorway, the Gay-Cat's whining quickened into half-sobbing whimpers, and he strained at the hay-rope harshly tying him to the tree. The Frisco Kid went to him, and patted his muzzling head, and whispered into his ragged ears all his terrifying apprehensions.

Then, looking along the pale ribbon of toll-road which led to the river, the Kid was heartened by sight of a great round orb swinging in the sky. The moon had risen. Now would Mears have to go on!

But of a sudden, out of the eye of the orb lunged a stream of light and the Kid realized then, with a lowering of spirit, that it was not the moon, but the searchlight of some steamboat feeling, head-on, for the dyke and bars on this side of the river.

A spray of sparks coughed up from the steamboat's funnels and it swung its broadside—a row of lights—toward him, and he even imagined he could see the white foam and hear the *swash-swash* of its churning paddle-wheel.

As he reentered the store, he heard Mears saying:

"Shore, I couldn't 'low to rob yo' o' yo' room, Jidge, not fo' love o' money. The spare room upstaihs is plenty good enough fo' sich as us, says I, en I says it moughty thankful. But all the same, I'm dead sot ag'in' stayin'.

"Ef thar's even on'y a inch o' moon in the sky, it's fo' my boys en thar pore ole blin' man to be up en walkin' along the road. Howsomevah—ah, heah yo' be," he broke off as the Kid appeared. "En is thar enny moon at all ternight?"

He peered eagerly at the Kid. The Frisco Kid shook his head.

"Yet it's kinder bright out," he qualified.

"Wal," said Mears slowly, "I dunno——"

"Oh, glory be!" interposed the old woman. "Looky h'yer! This leetle chap is all scrunched up in the cheer an' dead to the world in sleep, he's so plumb tuckered out with all the tall miles he's done kivered this day.

"Have done with all this talk uv gwyne on. Sakes alive, it would be a purty howdy-do, a pizen-mean shame, to make this leetle fellah go on further this evenin'."

The Frisco Kid looked at the piquant little picture of Gamaliel—asleep in the chair, his tiny pouting mouth open and smeared with stains of red from the huckleberry pie and of yellow from the pumpkin one, his large round eyes closed, his sombrero fallen on the floor, and his yellow curls

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tumbled about his ears. He heard Mears repeat once more—

"Wal, I dunno."

"Oh, go 'long," said the old woman, shooing them out of the kitchen. "Go 'long upstaihs, the hull kit an' bilin' uv yo'! I'll tote the leetle chap. H'yer, Ebenezer, tuck the lamp an' show the way."

CHAPTER IX

TAP, TAP, TAP!

THERE was a rickety staircase mounting from the store into the attic. The old man led the way, the lamp held above his white head; the Frisco Kid followed next; and the woman came after with the sleeping little Gamaliel held snugly in her arms. Bringing up the rear was the blind phoney man, his heavy knobby stick tap-tapping on the creaking stairs.

They entered a little slanting-ceilinged room which was lighted feebly by that dormer window from which swung and squeaked the large sign.

The room was filled by a large four-poster bed. There was a brass-bound trunk against the window, an old-fashioned marble-topped wash-stand in one corner, a horsehair sofa in another, and a rag carpet on the floor partly covered over by several coon skins. Here and there on the papered walls were several chromos of idyllic sylvan scenes, and here and there also bright patches where the lithographs formerly had hung.

The woman laid Gamaliel on the bed and, seeming to have taken a solicitous motherly fancy to him, was about to undress the little fellow for the night when Mears, in an unaccountable perturbation, interposed.

"Let be, let be!" he said hastily.

Then, at the surprised, bewildered expression in the old woman's eyes, he chuckled softly, and singsonged—

"I raiken yo'll have to pahdon me, m'am, but I wuz powerfully afeard yo'd wake him. I us'ally ondress Gamaliel myself. My ole woman, she says I got the lightest touch, lighter'n a fly, she says. En I cal'late yo' folks has done a heap enough fo' us—thar hain't menny would 'a' done as much—en I don't want to put yo' to enny moah trouble. Sho', jist leave a light heah fo' us, en we'll git along scrumpchously."

The old woman nodded that she understood and lighted a candle which stood on the wash-stand beside the crockery pitcher and bowl. Then, bidding them good-night the old couple went creaking down-stairs.

But Mears did not undress the little fellow. He went to the door and looked after the couple, harkening to their retreating footsteps; then closed the door softly again and came back to the bed. He removed Gamaliel's shoes and covered him over with a comforter. He took off, from beneath his shiny green swallow-tail coat, the heavy yellow oilcloth packs.

"Yo' sleep on the sofa," he said to the Kid.

The Frisco Kid stretched himself at full length on the sofa. He watched Mears take out one of his home-made cigars and extinguish the candle, and then he could see him sitting on the trunk, his back to the dormer window, his unkempt head and stoop shoulders in silhouette, and the lighted end of his cigar glowing and dying in the dark.

The Kid could not sleep. He was distraught, a prey to fears and dreadful imaginings. Below, very faintly, he could hear the old couple talking together.

All at once, outside, a prolonged mournful cry shattered the night and soared upward, shrill and vibrating, as though to pierce the remote stars. It died away sobbingly and a second cry rushed up, spearing the stillness like a sharp javelin. It was the howling of a dog. It sounded frightful, hideous, like the keening of a lost soul.

"Somebody's gwyne-a die ternight," said Mears somberly from the dark. It was as though he were talking to himself.

The Kid sat up, shivering.

"It's my Gay-Cat," he said.

"What? Is yo' awake, bo?"

"Yes, Jerry, and I think I'll go down and see what's the matter with my dog. I never heard him howl like that before. It's kinder creepy."

The blind man mumbled something, but did not openly object. As the Frisco Kid left the room, the thought appulsed on his brain that perhaps Mears did not want him to come back. He went down the creaking stairs.

The store still was open, and lighted by the rays from the oil-lamp glancing through the partly ajar door of the kitchen. Across the road was the Gay-Cat, up on his

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haunches, his nose lifted to the unapproachable stars and the howls mournfully ululating up through his throat.

"S-sh, Gay-Cat!" admonished the Kid.

The howling broke off into a quick succession of plaintive pleading whimpers. The Kid turned away. A sudden, desperate if vague plan had burgeoned in his brain. He approached the kitchen.

THE old man and woman were seated about the table. They rose up as he entered. They were on the point of saying something when, significantly, he put a finger to his lips.

Nervously he glanced about, and now his eyes rested longingly on the gun on the opposite wall and now they were raised fearfully to the ceiling, as though he dreaded lest the pedler might have his ear to the flooring above, or be looking down through some crack at him.

"What is it?" the old man asked in a shaking whisper, feeling the contagion of the Kid's nervousness.

The words stuck in the Kid's throat. Finally, with effort, he stammered inarticulately:

"Thet gun over there. You'll load it, won't yer? Aw, I wish yer would! I'm skeered somethin's gonna happen tonight. Don't ask me, I don't know what for sure. But you'll load the gun—you'll load the gun, won't yer, mister?"

The old man looked from the Kid to his wife, quickly, in bewilderment, and with something of telepathically induced fear. Just then, outside, the dog set up one prolonged piercing wail. Their teeth went on edge. The wail was thin as the scraping of a nail on a glass pane.

"See," said the Frisco Kid. "My dog, he knows. And he's a-warnin' of us. You'll load the gun, won't yer, mister?"

"Wal, I dunno," said the old man.

He looked almost pleadingly with his one bright eye at his wife. She nodded.

"Yes, yo' will, Ebenezer. Come to think on it, we've got a sight o' money h'yer tonight, more'n we've had in a long time, an' I don't like no dogs howlin' nights, nohow. It's a sartain bad sign. I'm most sho' we'd better load the gun fur this once, Ebenezer."

Mutely, with his deep-sunk eyes, the Frisco Kid thanked her. He tiptoed out of the room to the foot of the staircase. He listened. There was no sound overhead. Even his dog, out in the road, had quieted. It was as if the precaution he had caused the old folk to take in loading the gun had averted some fell fate.

At the top of the staircase, the Kid bumped full into Jerry Mears. He leaped back, terribly affrighted. Had the blind man overheard?

But Mears only asked—

"Has they bundled off to bed?"

"No," gulped the Kid.

"Wal, they orter soon," murmured Mears.

The Kid lay down on the sofa again, and this time prepared to sleep. A certain calmness had entered his mind. Yet for a little, he could not sleep. He watched the cigar in the blind man's mouth pulse and dull by turns, and he listened to the grind and squeak of the sign swinging outside the window. He heard the old man walking through the store below and then, as he locked the front door, the rattle and grate of a bolt being shot.

From far off, above the constant fritinancy of the crickets, he caught a sound as of negroes singing and the thrumming of banjos. And once, from the direction of the river, there came a loud boom as though a gun had been fired or a bank had caved in.

He was falling into a doze when the phoney man whispered—

"Is yo' asleep, bo?"

"N-no," he answered sleepily, and the next moment wished he hadn't.

For he realized, in that moment, the significance of the blind man's question and he thought that, had he not answered, he might have had opportunity to observe what the blind man purposed to do.

Mears swore.

"Dad blame it, why hain't yo'?"

"It's yer cigar. It bothers me, it looks so much like a openin' and closin' red eye."

Mears said no word to that, but stood up and ground the cigar under foot. The Kid saw his form move from the window into the darkness of the room. There was, from the straw-tick on the bed, a dry sound as of rustling papers, then the creak and groan caused by some deposited weight, and then all was still.

Long moments snailed by, the while the Kid listened on tenterhooks. He had been stirred into a new wakefulness. He wanted to hear the sound of deep breathing from the bed; but from the bed there came no sound at all. The singing of the negroes,

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the stridulating of the crickets out in the night, had died away. Everything was ghostly still. Even the squeak of the swinging sign had dulled.

He heard the cough of the steamboat, once again starting up the river and, as he counted the coughs, so still it was, he began to imagine he could hear the jingle of the small bells down in the hold. The last thing he remembered was the prolonged hooting of an owl.

An odd sound awoke him. For a single breath-fraction of time, so abrupt and startling had been the transition from sleep to harkening wakefulness, he was confused. He thought that the Gay-Cat was outside, scratching and softly thudding at the door with his paws. It was a sound just like that, a strangely familiar staccato sound—*tap, tap, tap!*

He remembered then. It was the blind man! He was stealing along the dark hall. He was walking down the rickety staircase. He was stealing down to rob the post-office!

CHAPTER X

AND THE KID MOVES ON

THE Frisco Kid sat up.

"Gay-May!" he called softly, and again: "Gay-May!"

There was no answer. He got afoot and went to the bed and felt all over the straw-tick. The little fellow was not there. He was gone. He was leading the blind man!

All his fears flooding back on him, the Kid stood in the center of the floor, listening. The creaking resounded from the rickety staircase, but the *tap, tap* came at longer intervals as though the blind man were feeling each stair carefully with his stick. The Kid knew, then, that Gamaliel was not leading the blind man. Were Gamaliel leading, Mears would not need to tap out his way with the cane.

No; Gamaliel was holding back in fear! He was being dragged along! He was to be used, later on, as a lookout or, perhaps, in finding the cash-drawer!

Like one in a dream the Kid listened and understood all this, and yet, as in a dream, he could not move. For an intolerable time he stood where he was, riveted to the spot, powerless to do aught but hearken,

There was, all at once, the echoing *crang!* of a rifle, and the stairs creaked loudly as under some falling weight, and a kind of moaning breathed its soft painful monotony through the dark.

The Frisco Kid, galvanized, leaped for the door.

"They's got him!" he ejaculated. "They's got Mears!"

A frightening hurly-burly of sound stopped him. He stood nonplused, one hand on the knob. From below there came a frenzied arpeggio of *tap, tap, tap!* The stairs creaked and squeaked as under a foot hurrying down. Came the voice of Mears, shrill, shaking with ferocity:

"I'll wring yo' neck, yo' —— one-eyed pahson! Let me git my han's on yo'! Wheah is yo', wheah is yo'?"

A second rifle *crang!* and the stairs shrieked, and for an eternity continued to shriek, as though some one were somersaulting down their whole length. A concluding and particularly heavy thud, and then silence—silence dark and uneasy, silence broken only by the dull sound of moaning. The signboard outside the window flapped and fretted.

The Kid pulled open the door and hurled himself into the hall. Now he knew who made that low moaning. He dashed down the stairs. Almost at the foot of the stairs, he tripped over a soft form and only a hand on the balustrade saved him.

He became aware, as he drew up, of two things. The Gay-Cat was barking outside and there was a loud knocking on the front door of the store. That knocking echoed peremptorily through the house.

He picked up the soft form at his feet. It was Gamaliel. He was moaning dull and brokenly as with pain, and his side was damply wet. The Kid felt that wet on his hands and, a great fear clutching his throat, he rushed with the boy down the remaining stairs.

There was a tremendous crash from the front door. As the Kid reached the bottom of the staircase, the door burst in. A long finger of light streaked from that shattered doorway down through the store. It illumined the form of the old woman hurrying, in white night-robe and slippers, between the laden counters toward the door.

It lighted upon the old man, in hastily donned trousers and shirt, the old-fashioned Springfield rifle in one hand, bare feet wide apart, backed against a glass case at the foot of the stairs and gazing, with horror

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chiseled on his face, at something which lay upon the floor before him. And it came to rest upon that something on the floor—the sprawled-out figure of Jerry Mears, head twisted unnaturally under him, the cane still clutched in one talon-like hand as if when he fell he had been about to strike, and the swallow-tails of his coat spread out like the lifeless wings of some dead bird.

The Kid stopped at the bottom of the stairs, Gamaliel moaning and bleeding in his arms. He could move no farther. The sprawled and strangely built form of the blind man lay in the way. The finger of light moved about like a trembling digit of suspicion, and then came forward as a number of men entered.

"Thet's him," said a voice. "Thet's him on th' floor. An' thet's his yunkers stannin' thar above him. By Jeber Socks, we'se shore got them co'nterfitters trapped!"

Shaking all over, the old woman lighted the reflected kerosene-lamp of the store. The man who had spoken stood pointing a ragged whip at Mears and the Kid. He was that Dunc' Jenks, in straw hat and jeans, who had ridden to the township some hours before.

Behind him were several men. The one just alongside of him, holding the flashlamp, was a tall frock-coated man, in the middle thirties, with the clean-cut aquiline features of authority. He asked—

"What's happened heah, Ebenezer?"

"I shot him, Kunnel Che'msfo'd. He wah a-tryin' to rob us an' I shot him. An' I nevah shot a white man in my life afo'. Oh, my God!"

The old man was aghast at that which he had done. But quietly the colonel came up to him and took the rifle away, as one might take an object away from the hands of a wax figure.

"It's not so bad as yo'-all think," he said with decision. "This fellow's a counterfeiter and we're after him, been after him for some time. We heard the shots. We were just gwyne on to Dunc' Jenks's place where we thought they'd put up to-night.

"Jenks had invited them to stay ovah at his house just to hold them theah, while he went to town to determine if their phoney greenback was good. We broke in when we heard the shots. He can't be dead. Hear that moaning?"

"But it ain't Jerry Mears moanin', mister," burst out the Kid. "It's this little boy here in my arms. He's been shot and there's blood all over——"

"A little boy!" ejaculated Colonel Chelmsford.

"Shore a little boy!" returned Dunc' Jenks. "This co'nterfitter, has a hull raff o' childern a-wukkin' off his ol' bills fur him."

"Oh, I've kilt the fathah uv a fambly! An' I nevah kilt ennythin' more'n an Injun in my life afo'. Oh, my God!"

"He ain't our father. I jes' met him yisterday and this little feller, Mears picked him up in the flood four years ago, and he's hurt, mister, hurt bad. Won't you save him? Save him, mister, and then yer can 'rest us afterwards."

The colonel motioned the old woman to take the conscience-stricken Ebenezer into the kitchen. Then he stepped across the body of Mears and lifted Gamaliel from the Kid's arms. There was a peculiar staggered look on his face.

"Come heah, Rawlins," he said.

Followed by a tall man with a beard under his chin, he carried Gamaliel into the old couple's sleeping-room.

The Frisco Kid waited with his heart lumped in his mouth, wondering whether Gamaliel was seriously wounded or not, desiring to follow the two, yet afraid to step across the body of the blind man. Some of the men lifted up the body now, and dragged it full into the light of the store lamp.

As they did, something warm and furry darted against the Kid's legs, and whimpered up at him in commingled fright and joy. It was the Gay-Cat.

The Kid dropped down on his knees and whispered into those ragged ears:

"It's all my fault, Gay-Cat. I tole Ebenezer to load the rifle, and he did, and now he's killed Mears and wounded Gay-May, I dunno how bad. Mebbe—mebbe he's dyin'!"

It was a horrible thought. The Kid rose up and turned toward the closed door of the sleeping-apartment in the rear through which Rawlins and the colonel had disappeared.

As he did, one of the men in the store, Dunc' Jenks, said:

"Looket thet beam in his eye. I nevah remarked it perticklar whin he had his spec's on, but I'll be hornswoggled, it does look powerful familiar, naow. Who was

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it I once knowed had a beam in his eye?

"By Andy Jackson, I know who had a cast in his eye 'nd in the right eye, too! But I nevah thought uv it afore coz he's ruined his eyes altogether, most gone batblin' makin' steel dies fo' his ole co'nterfit money. It wah Solermun Baggerly!"

The men ejaculated in astonishment—

"The moonshiner?"

"Baggerly, the kidnaper?"

"Law, I nevah would 'a' knowed him with his glasses 'nd stoop, 'nd his wrinkles!"

THE door in the rear was flung open, at that moment, and the colonel burst forth, his face white with some great emotion.

"Men, men!" he called as though distracted. "It's not a boy, it's a girl! It's she—Celestie! Drive down to the house some one and tell my wife! Bring her heah —oh, my God!"

There was a rush toward the room in the rear, a sudden hesitation, and then, shouting incoherently, the men plunged out into the night.

The Frisco Kid stood stupefied amid the whirl of events. Dimly he knew now, of course, that Gay-May had found his folks. But something else was doggedly worrying him.

"Is he—is he bad hurt, mister?" he asked.

The colonel looked at him. The colonel looked at him for a long moment, as though trying to place from what particular crack in the floor he had sprung. Suddenly, as the light of recognition leaped to his eyes, all sublime joy fled his face.

His face stiffened and became swiftly engraved with bitterness. It was as if all he had suffered, since he had lost his child, was congealed in resentment and acrimony at that moment upon the features of his face.

"You!" he snapped. "What do yo' want to know fo'? Yo' stole her away from me, yo' and Baggerly theah four years ago, and now yo've nigh brought her to her death. I know what I did to Baggerly—I broke up his illicit whisky business and caused him to slink into hiding—but as God is my judge, I don't know what I evah did to yo! Yo' clear out of heah. Baggerly's dead and yo'd better clear out, right now, yo' thief, befo' I arrest yo'!"

The colonel stepped forth threateningly. The Frisco Kid slunk away, quite crestfallen and fearful, the dog hugging his legs, the tragic stump of tail snuggling his back. But altogether suddenly, Long John Rawlins appeared at the colonel's side and laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"She wants fo' to' see him—thet youngster thar."

"She? Celestie? Why?"

"Beats me. But she's a-beggin' to see him an' his dorg."

The colonel stood aside, utterly astounded. Rawlins motioned the Kid to enter. But the Frisco Kid did not enter. The fact that Gamaliel had proved to be a girl upset all his philosophy of action. Were Gamaliel only a little boy, he would have entered that room with the manner of an elder brother, as one to whom such admittance was not only natural but due.

But Gamaliel wasn't a boy no more! She was a girl, the colonel's daughter, and the colonel was looking on, none too pleased. The Kid felt like running away.

And then, at that moment, sounding like music in his ears, Gamaliel's voice lifted in the room beyond.

"Dern it all, yo' lanky son-o'-a-steambo't-whistle, why don't yo' let him in? He hain't got nuthin' to do with thet pirut Mears. I tell yo' ole Jerry war 'nation skeered o' him 'n' hated him like pizen. Didn't he save me from a tannin' yisterday 'n' agin terday? Why, my golly smoke, he stuck up fo' me like a frien', 'n' he *is* my frien', 'n' now yo' won't lemme see him!"

The child's voice broke in a kind of fretful sob.

"Dad blame yo' all fo' ornery ole rapscallions 'n' Lemuels!" she added fiercely, with all her old manner. "Secret Sarvice er nuthin', yo' let him in, consarn yo'!"

An odd quirk twisted the colonel's lips, as he listened, and he smiled. He smiled down at the Frisco Kid in a new sympathy. Then, with a sudden warmth of feeling, he put his arm about the diffident youngster's shoulder and so, encouraging, drew him into the room.

Gamaliel was propped up in the bed, a pillow at her back, the red bandanna still knotted about her neck, cowboy fashion, and her yellow hair brushed away from her round blue eyes and curling about her ears. Her face was very dirty where she had knuckled her damp eyes with grimy hands. At sight of the Frisco Kid, a glad light broke through the misty storm of those eyes.

"Hullo, yo' ornery ole tramp," she

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greeted him. "Whar in tarnashun is yore puppy?"

The Kid held the Gay-Cat up in his arms. The girl reached over to pat his sharp yellow head, winced suddenly as with pain, and thereat, at her inability to move, grinned bravely.

"Is yer hurt bad, Gay-May?" asked the Kid solicitously.

"On'y a toler'ble light scratch on the side. Hit war the blood what skeered me most, mainly. Jiminy crickets, I thought I war kilt!"

"I jest' knew somethin' 'ud happen tonight, Gay-May, and so did my dog. If Gay-Cat hadn't howled and I hadn't tole thet ole man to load his gun, yer'd never 'a' been wounded——"

"Nor nevah 'a' foun' my folks, nuther. Thet's my pappy ovah thar, bo, what's a high-muckamuck in the Secret Service, 'n' my mammy, too, she'll be along in a breaf, they tells me. Hain't this bin the bangdest night evah!"

"Gee, I should say!" echoed the Kid. "When Gay-Cat howled this night, the phoney man said some one was a-gonna die, but he never thought it 'ud be hisself at all——"

"Naw. I raiken he 'lowed he'd go on fo'evah, stealin' money 'n' dorgs 'n' kids right 'n' left."

Thus they talked. Then, of a sudden out in the store, there was the sound of quick pattering footsteps, the swish of a dress, and in rushed a handsome young woman with the same glorious hair as Gamaliel's and the same blue trembling pools of eyes. And there was about her eyes, too, that delicate tracery of shadows which comes from many sleepless nights of sorrow.

With a low inarticulate moan of joy, she picked up the child in her arms, and hugged and kissed her again and again. She was Gamaliel's mother.

The Frisco Kid backed out of the room. Something about the tenderness and joy shown by the father and mother, but especially the mother, brought a choking lump into his throat. He could not stand to watch it. Memories rose in his mind—poignant memories of his own little mother standing at the gate near the bush of white marguerites and waiting all these years for him.

He went out of the store, followed by the dog. It was dawn, cold and wide and gray. High in the heavens a few stars fought against the growing light, twinkling brightly and strangely, like make-believe stars in the scenery of a stage. As his body drooped to the long walk, the Kid said to the dog at his side:

"Always movin', always movin' on. Gay-Cat, when we gets tired of bein' boes we'll go back to the valley and surprise my ma. But I guess—" with a wistful smile—"you and me'll never get tired of bein' hoboes. We're blowed-in-the-glass stiffs, we are, and it's in our blood."

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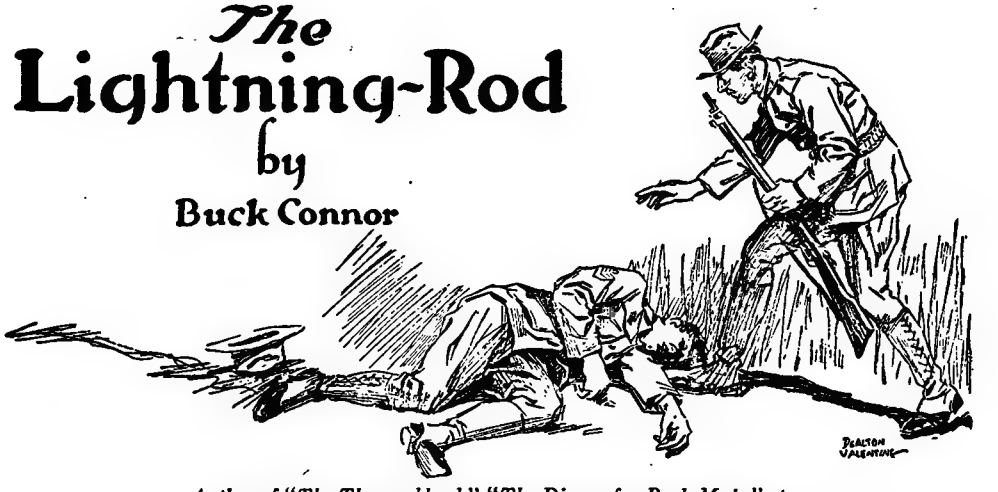
The Lightning-Rod

by

Buck Connor



Author of "The Thoroughbred," "The Diary of a Pack-Mule," etc.

"STOP THEM!" shouted an officer standing in the gymnasium of the Signal Corps barracks, as the two men fought up and down the floor to the muffled encouragement of their comrades. He rushed down into the center of the little crowd that watched the fight.

At his approach, other soldiers grabbed the two men and pulled them apart. Blood was gushing down one cheek of Sergeant Moore as he staggered free of the men that held him, to explain to his superior that "The Lightning Rod"—as they call a Signal Corps man—had started the fight.

The lieutenant listened, and turned to the other.

"What's your name?" he asked sternly.

The tall man's form was crouched catlike as he glared and struggled to get at the non-com again.

"What's your name, I asked you?" the officer repeated sharply.

The soldier with the cross flags chevrons looked dazedly at him and snorted—

"Daley—Rodney Daley."

Then he made another effort to wrench himself free to attack his enemy.

"Private Daley, when you address an officer!" snapped the lieutenant, and added; "Report to your commanding officer under arrest!"

Rodney Daley had no desire to report to his commanding officer or any other officer just then. What he wanted was to walk over to the man who had insulted him by calling him a —— fool lightning rod. As he was tall and lanky he might look like a lightning rod, but he was no "—— fool." He just wanted another smash at the non-com.

But there was no chance for further hostilities. The other men from the Signal Corps barracks were ordered to take him in charge, and with much coaxing they finally got him to go to his quarters.

The next morning, before instruction period, Daley appeared nonchalantly at the captain's office.

"An officer told me to tell you I was arrested," he said and gave a whimsical kind of shrug.

"Stand at attention!" snapped Captain Howe. "Now, make your report like a soldier. Name the officer, and say 'Ordered me to report myself under arrest!'"

With a shuffle of his feet as he brought them heel to heel in an attempt at military carriage, Daley obediently made his report as ordered.

"What have you been doing? Fighting?"

Captain Howe lifted the palm of his right hand to his forehead—perhaps to hide the twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

"Yes, sir. I tangled with one of them sergeants of hoss-soldiers up there in the gymnasium. He called me a —— fool lightning rod, and I busted him in the jaw," answered Daley in a serious tone, visioning the scrap.

"Well, who got the best of it?" inquired the captain, smiling.

"They wouldn't let me finish him when I did get straightened out an' at him. I guess we just about broke even."

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"Well, you go and get yourself cleaned up and report to me this afternoon after drill. Your case is serious. It's liable to go hard with you. Striking a non-commissioned officer is punishable by court martial."

Captain Howe was a true prophet. A summary court was convened in the case of Private Rodney Daley, and Private Rodney Daley was charged, in short order, found guilty, sentenced to serve thirty days in the post guard-house, to perform hard labor for that period, and to forfeit one month's pay.

PRIVATE DALEY stood on the lawn of Fort Myer, dressed in his new, ill-fitting, brown fatigue clothes, with his campaign hat set at a rakish, don't-give-a —— angle, and his two hands cupped over the end of the shovel handle. He recalled all of the fight, and the trial afterward. He was disgusted with his "hitch" in the army. They would make it hard for him during his entire enlistment, he reasoned. He had a mind to desert when he got out of the guard-house and got on his feet again. Getting on his feet meant getting a pay-day.

He wouldn't let any dang make-believe soldier, as he termed the cavalryman, try and beat him up, and then, just because he wouldn't let him get away with it, have to go and serve a whole month in "the mill" as they called the post jail or guard-house—while the sergeant got off without any punishment. By the so-and-so, he'd take another crack at that gent, and he'd make a real job of it! And then he'd just hit the high spots 'tween there and Texas.

A bugler, sounding evening mess call, started him from his planning, and the order to gather up his tools and fall-in, turned his mind toward the guard-house, a nice clean bath and a supper brought by a member of his company. Even in his sorry plight there were certain ameliorations.

AFTER the Spanish-American War, the natives of the Philippines revolted against our scant Army that supported Dewey in holding Manila. The Government organized several regiments of U. S. Volunteer Infantry and rushed them to the Islands, along with some cavalry and staff corps.

When the order came for the ——nth, Cavalry at Fort Myer to move, Rodney Daley was serving the small end of his sentence in the guard-house. He had enlisted for adventure, and adventure did not lurk in the daily grind of raking leaves and burning them, or in the digging of ditches to drain the timbered border of the post. While raking leaves and digging ditches are as essential to the soldier's success in arms as the tactics of military science, yet Rod Daley, as his company called him, could not class it with fighting, and fighting was what he had "took on" to do.

So he reasoned that if he could go to the Philippines he would not desert. He did not want to desert. He was no quitter, and if he could get some campaigning, he would get a chance to redeem himself in the service. He therefore approached the sentry.

"Say, bo, I want to see my commanding officer. Can I?" he asked the guard. "It's important business."

"Well, that's for the captain himself to say, whether you can see him or not. I'll tell the sergeant when he comes around," grinned the sentry.

To those who are not acquainted with the Service, and who seem to think that regular Army officers are snobbish with their men, and look down upon them from a perch of superiority, I want to say they are wrong in their summing up. The truth of the matter is, that most officers are not only willing to hear the men, but try to keep in touch with them as closely as discipline permits. The officers like their men and trust the most of them, and often boast of their individual efficiency over their dinners at the club when the talk turns to the Service.

So it did not require much routine to bring Private Daley before his commanding officer. Captain Howe was busy signing some papers, but he looked up from his desk and asked—

"What is it, Daley?"

"Captain, I'd like to go to the Islands. It'll be hard for me to make good here. I want to get some real service. Can I make application?"

Captain Howe did not reply at once. He eyed Daley critically—looked him up and down—and most officers have a way of sizing up their men. Daley's tousled sandy hair and keen blue eyes, his whole general make-up was soldier material, and Captain Howe recognized the fact. He touched a push-button under his desk, and the company clerk entered for orders.

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"Carrol, bring me Private Daley's descriptive list," he ordered, and went back to his papers while he waited.

"Rodney Daley, Private," read Captain Howe as he took the folded record the clerk brought. "Born in Concho, Texas. Occupation, cowman. Previous service, three years Texas Ranger Force." He folded the document and returned it to the clerk, looked at Daley with a little smile. "Certainly you may go to the Islands. You won't need make application. I am ordered there with a detachment of Corps men," he said pulling out a sheet covered with names to which he added, "Daley, Rodney, Private."

"Thank you, sir," said Private Rodney Daley, and retired.

"Wait a moment, sentry. Take the prisoner to the officer of the day and hand him this note." And Captain Howe reached for his desk-set and told the switchboard man to get the War Department, for he wanted to speak with General Greeley.

THE thirty days spent on the *Sheridan* by the troops in close quarters makes for nothing short of that unexplainable mood among men which I will call sea-fever—the enforced confinement to small space that makes red-blooded men fret from inaction. Several times had Private Daley and the sergeant he had fought passed each other; looked at each other with the antagonism that breeds fighting. But they always passed on, and neither could have told why he did not strike.

The China Sea lay in the stillness of a beautiful Spring day. The water's surface had that smooth, glassy shimmer so well known to travelers of Oriental seas. That smoothness was seldom disturbed except by a scampering flying-fish that would soar away from the ship's side trying to escape the monster that plowed a great gash in the water.

"Land ho!" came from the lookout in the crow's-nest.

Every soul on the spar deck turned his face to the bridge, listening. The officer of the watch, asked, "Where away?" and the lookout replied, "Two points on the port bow," and spread his right hand fan-like to that point from the line of the bowsprit.

A little farther on, and the signal station on Corregidor hoisted a cone and ball to the yard-arm that would be sighted by other vessels doing patrol, whose commanders would know a friendly ship was entering the blockaded harbor.

Inside Manila Bay—farther on toward the mouth of the Pasig—one could see numerous craft. Riding at anchor, with their scrubbed clothes flying from the lines triced up to the fore-truck, lay the *Petrel*, *Baltimore*, and *Olympia*, Dewey's flagship. Some lorchas, tugs and smaller vessels scurried here and there.

A trim little tug, with a yellow flag floating full in the breeze, raised by her own speed, came gliding out to meet the transport. Besides the health officer, it carried other officials—among them being an aide from Army headquarters with orders that would send a battalion of cavalry and some staff corps details to Iloilo.

"The troops will transfer to the *Neesan* as soon as the vessel clears quarantine. Lighters will be furnished by the Quartermaster's Department," the order read.

FOLLOWING close on the bombardment of the Southern city and the landing of troops under the big-gun fire, the scattered bands of insurrectos reorganized in the terrain of Dumungas.

Dumungas Swamps, as it became known, offered many advantages to the enemy—their method of fighting being that of guerrilla warfare—and the American troops had their work cut out for them.

An expedition followed soon, but not soon enough to attack the insurgents before they had a strategic position for defense.

The troops had reached a point well toward the middle fork of the Dumungas River—which drained a very large plain—and had been fired upon. The volley-firing, while not accurate, was taking a toll. The troop commander was quick to see that they were outnumbered, and ordered the men to use the rice-dyke as a breastworks.

"Keep your bodies under cover!" he commanded those whose impulses were to be looking across the open; to where the natives kept up a constant rifle-fire.

An officer coming up from the rear, saluted the captain.

"Sergeant Hall's detachment is incommunicado, sir."

"His orders were to keep within hailing distance of the main body," replied the captain, and added, "these swamps are so cut up with small streams he may have gone wrong on his bearings."

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Behind the breastworks, with his signal flags ready for instant use, lay the Lightning Rod, taking an occasional shot at any native who happened to show himself.

He had stopped to reload his revolver and happened to look out across the barren ground toward the enemy's line. Just as he was pushing home the last cartridge and closing the cylinder, he saw some brush shaking over there. He laid his gun down and reached in the leather case for his field-glasses, and was adjusting them when he heard a call, faint above the rattle of gun-fire.

Men nearly always do a good deal of shouting when on the firing line, unless ordered to keep silence by their officers, and he could not distinguish the words. He hurriedly focused his glasses along the brush-fringe on the farther side, and took a sweeping search of that portion. The *gugus*, as they had named the natives, might be making ready for a flank attack.

He broke his sweeping search by taking a look with the naked eyes, and was sure he saw something fall in the brush. He hurriedly readjusted his glasses on the little trail, and saw a soldier crawling on his stomach. Again the call came, and he heard faintly—

"We're gettin' shot to pieces!"

Hastily replacing the glasses in their case Private Daley turned and looked down the line of men to his right. The native firing was deadly. He could see bodies of troopers lying there limp; some bent double as they had slid lifeless from the little incline of the breastworks. The officers were ordering a retreat to the better cover of the thick brush behind them, and the soldiers were beginning to stagger back, taking their wounded and dying with them.

Private Daley grabbed a carbine from the ground near him, saw that the magazine was filled with ammunition, and with one leap he was on his feet and racing across the bullet-riddled open space.

An officer waiting to see that the men were all obeying the order to retire, saw one soldier with signal flags and a carbine running in the opposite direction, and stared after him amazed. He surely couldn't be deserting? Yet a few cases are on record where men crazed with battle-fear have rushed toward the enemy and given themselves up. He was too far away to be recalled by command, with all that noise of firing going on. The officer turned away and let him go. He would report it to the commanding officer—if he lived long enough.

A bullet from the volley that was aimed at the running man found its mark, a sharp sting just below his right knee sent the Lightning Rod stumbling to the ground, bullets kicking up the sand around him. He scrambled to his feet and limping ran into the opening of the little trail that he had marked as his goal, and went down again.

A soldier with the chevrons of a sergeant lay sprawled across the path, and groaned with the wounds he had received.

Private Daley recognized him as his enemy of the gymnasium fight. The man heard some one moving near, and opened his eyes slowly. But the Lightning Rod, hobbled behind a clump of bushes like a thief, and Sergeant Hall saw only an empty trail in the brush. When his heavy lids closed again Private Daley jerked out a bandanna, and wrapped it around the head of the wounded man to cover a small gash over the eye. With a heave and a grunt he picked the man up by the waist-band and slung him across his shoulder jack-knife fashion, and hobbled away into the brush.

Carrying a grown man is no easy task. To carry him limp on your shoulder under fire is worse. To Private Daley, with the bullet in his leg, carrying the sergeant through a thick undergrowth of tropical brush while guarding against an attack from the enemy, it was simply heart-breaking. Foot by foot, yard by yard, he fought the swamp growth to an open space where he found bog-footing, and rested there, as long as he dared, drawing long breaths, nerving himself up to tackle the muck and water before him.

The wounded man, reviving under the pain of his injury, wept for his men who had been killed, cursed the Filipinos, and mumbled vain longings for a cold drink, for home—for every unattainable blessing he could think of. Private Daley listened, wiped the sweat from his fly-tortured face, tore off his shirt-sleeves to bind tight the wound in his leg, and finally shouldered the sergeant grimly and went on.

"Why the devil don't you say something?" the burden on his back complained fretfully, "Yuh dumb, man?" And then, "Lemme lay over on your other shoulder——hole in my side—your shoulder-blade gouges it every step——"

Private Daley stopped and shifted his

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load, resting on his good leg and trying to forget the intolerable pain of the other. Then, with his lips set grimly together, he went blundering on, a fresh ache in every inch of the long length of him.

"I guess the bone ain't busted, or she'd cave under with me," he comforted himself.

"Say something, why don't you?" demanded Sergeant Hall, half crazy with the fever of his wounds.

We ain't on speakin' terms, that's why, thought Private Daley, and set his jaws and staggered on.

The Lightning Rod labored all that afternoon in getting his man to the rear, which meant the point where the main body had bivouacked for the night. He would have called any man a liar who told of such a feat, and yet he did it, and grinned at the way he was accomplishing the impossible.

He did it—he got as far as the sentry on outpost. And when the challenge barked at him he heaved a sigh of relief, let Sergeant Hall slide off his back, and slumped down in a heap beside him.

IN THE soft glow of sunset—just when it was slipping into the brightness of full moon—Sergeant Hall turned over to ease a wound on his right side. The left side had a couple of bullet-holes also, but he forgot to swear when the weight of his body tweaked it with pain. He was looking straight into the face of the man he had fought at Myer, and the sight of him recalled vividly the scrap. If it wasn't that he was a badly wounded man, and the other showed an antiseptic dressing on his right leg, and looked as if he were suffering too, he'd settle it right there!

The Lightning Rod opened his eyes. He, too, looked into the eyes of his enemy. Neither spoke for a long time. Then the non-com turned his head impatiently and moistened his lips.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked, gruffly.

"Nothing much. Just got hit a couple of times more when we started back."

"Started back? Started back where?"

Just then the captain, walking around to see if his men were being taken care of properly, stopped in front of the Lightning Rod, and felt his forehead for fever.

"I don't understand how you stood it," he remarked, as he stooped and looked at the dressing.

Then he looked across at Sergeant Hall.

"You're pretty heavy for a man to carry half a day through that swamp," he said.

"I don't understand, Captain. Somebody carried me somewhere—but——"

Then the captain told him.

When the troop commander had gone away to see if the camp was secure for the night, when the coolness of the evening had refreshed both men, and their injuries hurt less, the two lay and looked at the moon as she was swinging down over the summit of the mountain range of Panay.

"Why did you do it?" Sergeant Hall muttered at last. "You fought —— hard and it's always been a question in my mind if I could have whipped you."

The Lightning Rod looked up at the moon, and his lips twitched with the impulse to smile.

"What did you do it for, Lightning Rod?"

"Well, I dunno—it's hard to say," he answered slowly. "I don't guess I know myself. But we had a fight, and you-all fought —— hard—they stopped us so I never was right sure I could 'a' licked you. And I hated the sight of you, and I'd have piled into you at the drop of a hat any old time. But on the firing-line—well, you was one of our boys. And I couldn't leave you to be caught and tortured—and—— what was the use of streaking it across to that brush for nothing? And anyway," he added shamefacedly, "I've found out they call us Signal Corps men lightning rods. I thought it was my tallness. A man's always sorest when he's in the wrong."

They lay for a while and looked at the moon. Then.

"Here's the makin's," said Sergeant Hall. "Let's smoke on it."

Private Daley reached across and somehow the two hands touched and clasped tight in the grip of friendship.

"I don't guess either of us'll forget that trip," said Private Daley, and grinned.

"One of us won't," said Sergeant Hall softly, and was not ashamed of the blurr in his voice.

Private Daley's fingers shook while he rolled two cigarets and lighted them both with one match.

In peace they smoked and looked up at the moon.

"Some trip, all right," said Private Daley, and smiled.

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A Tin Cup Trophy

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "A Bull Movement in Yellow Horse," "Nerves of Iron," etc.

"I HOPE that we have perpetual hot weather, and that the old man has to cook bread all the rest of his danged life," pronounces Telescope Tolliver, drawing up his long legs so as to get all of his long carcass out of the sun. Me and Muley Bowles nods agreeable like.

We're setting in the only shady place around the Paradise depot, cussing the heat, the train and the old man Whittaker, owner of the Cross J cow outfit.

The old man has been expecting uh new cook-stove every train for the last seventeen days. Expecting that stove is getting to be uh mania with him. He elects the three of us as pall-bearers for that blasted stove, and we been waiting at the depot every day since two days after the old man sent the order to Chicago. The only times he didn't send us was the day he sent the order and the day after. Hauling cook-stoves in uh lumber-wagon ain't what I'd designate as the height uh bliss, when the thermometer is sticking around the one double o in the shade.

Telescope Tolliver orates that he's uh direct descendant of uh noted tribe uh that name, which are believed to have infested Kentucky at one time. According to his opinion, there ain't nothing on earth nor the waters under the earth to compare with the Tollivers.

In one respect he's right. If they're all like him they're sure entitled to uh separate cage in any zoo. Telescope sings. Any way, he says he does. I ain't no judge uh music, except as she's played on uh banjo. I sure can twang that round-headed instrument to the queen's taste, and when the occasion demands it I can raise my voice in song. I can state that the demand never did exceed the supply.

Muley is uh poet. He can't no more help writing poetry than I can eating. Muley ain't no long-haired, moth-eaten thing that generally opines to make words rhyme. Not any! Muley is uh lumpy individual, with uh face like uh milk cheese, and he rides the biggest saddle-tree in the State. You can tell Muley's string by their sprung knees and general worn appearance.

Telescope looks just like what Muley would if Muley was put under pressure and then rolled out. Telescope sure is uh long ways from his spurs. For that reason most uh his songs goes over our heads. He specializes on "Sweet Marie" and "Break the News to Mother." I plays parts of 'em on my banjo.

"Well," says Muley, "there's the danged thing whistling. I wonder why uh train has to whistle for uh depot like this for?"

"What do yuh think it ought to do—recite poetry?" asks Telescope. "Uh train whistles cause it can't sing."

"I'd admire to hear you cultivating uh whistle, then," retorts Muley, and we all stands to welcome that stove.

The train groans into Paradise. I reckon uh train groans into Paradise, 'cause they takes water there. The conductor hops off and Telescope asks him if there's uh stove come for us.

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"Stove!" says he, gasping for breath. "Did you say stove?"

"It's going to be painful for both of us if I has to repeat that name again," states Telescope. "But, as you seems hard uh hearing I'll repeat her once more. Stove. S-t-o-v-e. Sabe?"

"For you?" asks the conductor, fanning himself with his cap.

Now, wasn't that uh brilliant remark to make out there on that blistering board platform, with the thermometer one hundred in the shade? It really was Telescope's argument, but Muley takes it off his hands and chases the conductor the full length uh that train. Said conductor barely escapes by climbing into the engine and throwing chunks uh coal at Muley. We're laughing uh heap at Muley who is returning the coal, when we hears the voice of uh medder lark behind us—

"I beg your pardon."

"You're welcome, ma'am," says Telescope, turning and bowing like uh willow in the wind.

There's three of them. Maybe beauty is only skin deep, but, by the whispering wolves, the one that begs our pardon has got anything skinned I ever seen. All I can think of is peaches and cream and strawberries, and her eyes—huh! Did yuh ever get real thirsty, and then look through uh glass uh cold beer, just below the foam. That's the color I mean. Sort of uh cool, thirsty brown, with specks floating in the lighter spots.

The other two are uh heap practical-looking. One was quite uh good-sized girl in 1880, and the other—well, she was too old to eat pie with uh spoon at that time, too.

"Is there any game near here?" asks one of the older ones, after Telescope gets back to his normal position.

"Yes'm," says I. "But I'd advise yuh to pass 'em up. There's uh faro and uh chuck-luck game over in Dug Chaffin's, and over in Mike Pelly's place yuh can set into uh jack-pot game or lose your substance on the wheel. We ain't trying to knock Dug or Mike, yuh understand, but we sure don't want to see yuh go up against uh brace game and not know it."

"Elks?" she asks, sort uh undecided like.

"Mike is," says I. "Dug's uh—say, Telescope, what's Dug?"

"Dug's uh—uh—Woman uh Woodcraft, I reckon," stutters Telescope, and just then Muley comes back, panting like uh winded pup, from throwing rocks at the rear end of the train.

He horns down the platform with his head down and don't see our company.

"Gol-danged bunch uh rattler-riding rummies!" he puffs. "Uh conductor what don't know the word 'stove' when it's spelled ought to be tutored by uh turnip! By the gods, some day I'll hit that conductor with uh—uh—zziguzz!"

That last is the correct spelling of the word Muley utters when he looks up and sees them females.

THEY looks at him sort of reproving like. Muley tries to remove his hat by grabbing it by the top, and he gets his hands full uh hair at the same time. He just simply lifts hair and all until his face looks like he had the measles.

"Pleased to meet yuh," he states, with his hair standing up like the roach on uh grizzly. "So yuh came, did yuh?"

"Was yuh looking for us?" asks the lovely one, and Muley has to swaller three times before he is able to nod.

"Uh-huh," says he. "We certainly am."

"Well, isn't that queer, auntie?" says she to the oldest-looking female.

"Yes'm, it sure is," admits Muley. "You see, it's like this; I figgered that if we came here often enough——"

"He has visions, ma'am," explains Telescope. "He's known for seventeen days something was coming to us on uh train, and we been here every day to welcome it when it did come. We has perfect faith in Muley thataway."

"Lemuel Allender Bowles, ma'am," states Muley. "I am your obedient servant."

"I'm yours respectfully, John Quincy Tolliver," bows Telescope. "I am of the Kentucky Tollivers. This here bashful person on my right is Hen Peck. Whenever I introduces him it gives me the feeling that I'm trying to induce uh barnyard fowl to foller its natural intentions."

"Henry Clay Peck," I pronounces, sort uh peevish like. "The Peck family never was mixed up in no feud nor suckled uh bottle uh moonshine whiskey, but they're honest. My paw was uh poor but Missouri farmer, and all he left to me when he left this vale uh suffering was his first and last names. Our farm was in Clay County,

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so they had no trouble in picking out uh middle name. I'm sincerely yours."

"I am Violet Middleton," states the beautiful person. "This is my aunt, Miss Matilda Flanders and this other lady is Miss Olive Annibel Anderson."

We all bows and perspires fluently.

"Now, about this here game," remarks Telescope. "If I was in——"

"I greatly fear that you misunderstood us," states the one designated as Miss Matilda. "We meant wild animal hunting. We were informed that wild game abounds in these hills. Such as elk, deer, cariboo, moose, antelope and bison."

"We can't deny the allegation, ma'am," grins Telescope. "We been gunning for uh stove for so long that we ain't had uh chance to look into the game situation. Do you aim to hunt?"

"We came here with that intention," orates Miss Olive. "We were informed in Chicago that we could likely secure guides and so forth at Paradise."

"And so forth," agrees Muley. "Yes, I reckon you could."

"They threw all our baggage off the other side of the train," states Miss Matilda, pointing at uh pile uh plunder on the cinders.

"Yes'm," agrees Muley. "They was afraid to open the door on this side," and then Muley surprises 'em pleasantly by reciting sort uh offhand like:

Down in the lovely valley, where the milk cows play,
There grows uh shrinking flower by the wall.
They calls this flower Violet.
The name becomes her well.
She's the sweetest little blossom of them all.

This here Violet person looks so pleased that she has to bite her lips to keep from crying, but just the same her eyes fills with tears. It affects Miss Matilda so much that she has uh fit uh coughing, and Telescope has to pound her between the shoulders. Telescope ain't no weakling, and Miss Matilda recovers immediate.

"That was—er—simply beautiful," states Miss Violet. "Did you make that up out of your head?"

"He sure did, ma'am," says Telescope. "Muley's uh wonder. Recite her that one yuh made about——"

I've heard the one that Telescope is about to refer to, so I busts the request in its infancy by asking—

"Do you like music?"

"Immensely," says Miss Violet. "Do you sing?"

"Telescope does," I states. "I exhibits my talents on uh banjo."

"Auntie," says Miss Violet, "we seem to have run into a talented trio in the wilds." And me and Muley and Telescope bows and scrapes uh little more.

"Now, about this hunting venture?" says Miss Matilda. "Would you advise us to stop here?"

"Well, I'd tell uh man," observes Telescope. "Do yuh wish to specialize on any certain kind uh game?"

"Perhaps it may look funny for three women to be out for a hunt, but it's a fact," states Miss Matilda. "We have been planning on a Western outing for a long time, and we want to rough it. We have steeped ourselves in all the literature procurable on the subject, and we long for the free untrammeled life, away from the conventions of society. We have what you would probably call 'tender feet,' and we desire to procure competent guides and so forth. Heretofore we have spent our vacations in fashionable watering-places, and we long for a change."

"Ma'am," says Telescope, "you've come to all that. We'll harden your feet and keep yuh away from the water-holes."

"Do you mean to say that you are guides?" asks Miss Matilda, and the three of us bows once more.

"Probably the best on earth," says I.

"Then we had better give them entire charge," opines Miss Olive. "They can take charge of our baggage and arrange for our transportation to the woods."

We takes 'em over to Hammond's hotel and stacks 'em up against uh feed uh ham and eggs, and then retires for uh council uh war.

"What are we going to do now?" asks Telescope. "We ain't guides."

"That ain't no reason why we can't be, is it?" asks Muley.

"There ain't uh danged thing to do at the ranch, and won't be for uh couple uh weeks. I figures that this will be uh happy holiday, if yuh asks me. We can pilot that bunch around the hills to uh fare-thee-well, can't we? That little Violet person——"

"Uh-huh," agrees Telescope. "She sure is. How about you, Hen?"

"What about the old man's cook-stove?" I asks. "Somebody's sure to go to the ranch and tell him where we're going."

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"Gosh A'mighty!" snorts Telescope. "I plumb forgot such mundane things as stoves. You go on up and tell him, Muley. Me and Hen will stay here and arrange for transportation."

"Like ——!" howls Muley. "If there's any dirty work to be done it's shoved off on me. How yuh going to arrange for transportation? Let's all go up and see the old man. We got to have some broncs. We ain't got nothing for them ladies to ride, and we ain't got no pack-saddle nor nothing. We're in fine shape to take an outfit out for hunting."

"Muley's right," says Telescope. "We sure can't pack that bunch uh plunder on our backs, and the ladies orate that they got tender feet. You and Muley go back, and I'll stay here in the interests of our fair clients. That's fair."

"We'll let the cards decide," says Muley. "Low man stays."

For once in my life I'm lucky and cuts uh five-spot against uh ten and uh queen. They gets into the wagon and drifts out uh town in the dust, after making me hold up my right hand and swear that I'll confine myself to business.

I GOES up to the hotel and gets uh list uh groceries from Miss Matilda that would fill uh box-car. I takes the list over to "Smoky" Sellers, the storekeeper. Smoky looks at the list for uh minute or two, and then hands me the key.

"Take the house, Hen," says he. "Maybe you will find some of everything inside these four walls, but not that amount. Old Whittaker must uh sold his herd."

"Smoky," says I, "you don't appreciate the gastronomical powers of humanity. This is uh meager grub stake for uh hunting-trip. Sabe?"

"Hunting trip!" he snorts. "What does anybody want to hunt for when they got that much money to spend for grub?"

"We wishes to live the untrammeled life, Smoky," says I. "We wishes to rough it and harden our feet. We desires to avoid the fashionable water-holes, and—it's none uh your danged business, anyway."

I moves most uh Smoky's stock out in the street and mounts guard over it so that the itinerant Piegans can't pack it home with them. Paradise comes down in uh body and groups around my purchases, but I refuses to answer questions. Them three females strolls around town after the sun goes down, but Muley and Telescope don't show up until the next noon. When they does show up they got the finest bunch uh mixed stock and saddles yuh ever saw. I walks around the bunch and looks 'em over.

"Don't be critical, Hen," advises Telescope, when I grins at the layout.

"Not critical—careful," says I. "I'd say thet these didn't all come from the Cross J."

"Well," drawls Muley, "yuh can draw your own conclusions. The old man wouldn't let us have uh danged head of his stock. He orates the Constitution of the United States to us, and Telescope replies with the Declaration of Independence. She's some conversation for to hear, believe me. All we was able to get away with was our own property. We leaves the old man setting on the front porch with uh rifle in his hands and sorrow in his heart. He sure mourns that stove uh heap."

"Can't he come down and get it himself?" I asks.

"Got uh boil," explains Telescope. "One uh them blind boils—he can't see it. Sabe?"

"Flying H, Bridle Bit, Figure Eight, Bar X and Lazy Y," I enumerates aloud, and they both grins.

"Sort of uh mulligan, eh, Hen?" laughs Muley. "I wanted to take all Lazy Y stuff, but Telescope was cautious. We takes what is handy from each place, swipes the pack-saddles from the Bar X and them three riding rigs from Doughgod Smith. Since Doughgod was disappointed at the altar his rigs has just hung there and gathered moss. He won't miss 'em."

"Well," says I, "I ain't as pure as the beautiful snow, but I states right here and now that I protests your actions at the top uh my voice, but so long as the play comes the way she does I'll—did yuh think to bring my banjo?"

They both shakes their heads, sad like.

"No, we didn't, Hen," replies Telescope. "With the old man feeling the way he did, I feel that I was plumb lucky to get away with my voice."

"I always did argue that uh mechanical genius was handicapped," states Muley. "No matter what happens, me and Telescope is always packing our abilities and talents."

"To the utter exclusion of others," I replies. "I suppose you figures that by

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handicapping me it will give you and Telescope uh clearer track, eh? Not by uh danged sight it don't! I'll sing!"

They both looks at me, sort uh sad like, and Telescope says—

"Muley, I'll cut the cards with yuh to see who goes after his blasted banjo."

But Muley shakes his head.

"Not any," says Muley. "It's two to one, Telescope, and after them females hears him sing it will be five to one. Five to one ain't exactly what I'd call the survival of the fittest. Do yuh still feel like singing, Henry?"

"Under them circumstances I got uh frog in my throat," says I. "Here comes the females."

"Oh, what a lovely lot of ponies, auntie!" exclaims Miss Violet. "Isn't that rose-colored one a dear!"

"Yes'm," says I. "He runs like a deer and pitches like the devil."

"May I pat him?" she asks, and that voice almost makes me forget to be cautious.

"You may, and you may not," says I. "He's uh thing uh beauty, but he'll kick all the joy out uh your life if he gets uh chance. If you can pat him from here—go to it, but don't get any closer."

Being as she's about twenty feet from that roan the play is plumb safe and sane.

We manages to rope most uh that plunder on six uh them broncs, and picks three tame ones for the women to ride. They happens to have skirts which were made for riding uh man's saddle, and the dangdest collection uh guns you ever seen.

One uh them guns attracts us uh heap. It weighs about fifteen pounds, and is double barreled. Miss Matilda sees us looking at it, so she explains:

"That gun came from Africa," says she. "It was found to be highly effective on big game."

She produces uh couple uh ca'tridges. They're about the size of uh twelve-gage shotgun shell, only these are loaded with uh bullet, and in the end of the bullet is an explosive.

"I have only these two," says Miss Matilda. "Don't you suppose I could get some more here?"

"Ma'am," replies Telescope, handing them back to her, "two is uh plenty."

We helps Miss Violet and Miss Olive on to uh pair uh broncs, and then essays to boost Miss Matilda into uh saddle. She sticks out uh foot, but steps back and looks serious.

"This one is plumb gentle, ma'am," says Telescope.

"Without a doubt," agrees Miss Matilda.

"Well, what's the matter, auntie?" asks Miss Violet, impatient like.

"Are either of you guides married?" asks Miss Matilda.

"Not uh bit," replies Telescope. "We're heart and fancy free and past twenty-one."

"Well," says she, "that spoils everything. Pshaw! Isn't it queer that I never thought of it before. We simply can't go."

"Would you mind explaining why we can't?" asks Miss Olive.

"Not at all, my dear. How would it look for three unmarried ladies to go into the wilds with three single men?"

"My Gawd!" says Muley, solemn like. "Ain't that prepossessing!"

"Wouldn't that put uh rabbit *hors de combat?*" snorts Telescope.

"Well, this seems to end it," snaps Miss Olive. "I never started any place with you yet, Matilda, that you didn't pick a flaw some place."

"No use hurling recriminations, Olive," chides Miss Matilda.

"We must have a chaperon, that's all there is to it."

"I wonder where we could get one?" says Miss Olive.

We all thinks for uh few minutes, and then Telescope seems to rope an idea.

"Ma'am," says he, "is there any restrictions connected with uh chaperon's position? If yuh just hanker for married folks maybe we can fill the bill. Uh course maybe you'll have to pay 'em uh little."

"That will be agreeable," she nods. "All I ask is that they're respectable and congenial."

Telescope calls me off to one side and gets confidential.

"Hen," says he, "do you know where we could get uh couple uh congenial chaperons what are respectable?"

"Mister Tolliver, I don't," says I.

"Ma'am," states Telescope, walking over to Miss Matilda, "Mister Peck and me has got an idea that we knows just where to put our hands on the couple yuh wants. Mister Bowles will pilot the caravan out to Roaring Lion Crick, while we fulfils the obligation concerning chaperons."

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MULEY grins, and hazes that outfit away through the dust, while me and Telescope pilgrims over to Mike Pelly's place.

"How," says Telescope, while Mike rings up the money.

"How, is right," says I. "How?"

Telescope looks over the assembled bunch uh suckers, who try forever to hit the lucky spot on the wheel, and shakes his head.

"Hen," says he, "I never knowed uh place where there was fewer married folks than in Paradise, so I can't answer your question. There's old Doughgod Smith. He's about the most nearly married of any one I know—being as he was disappointed at the preacher's house. He might like to go."

"I'll get Doughgod if you'll rustle the female," I states.

Telescope thinks deep for uh while and then grins.

"Hennery Peck, you said something. Get your half and foller the caravan. I got uh hy-iu idea."

Telescope ducks out, and I goes over and sets down beside of Doughgod.

"Hello, Hen," says he. "Going to help Mike pay the rent?"

"Not me, Doughgod," I replies. "Busting wheels ain't never been no desire uh mine. The only system I ever had was eating—three times uh day. How would yuh like to be a chaperon?"

"I'm satisfied to be the way I am," says he, filling up that vile old pipe he carries. "I'm what I am, Hen, and I don't believe in wishing I was something I ain't and never can be."

"Solomon never had nothing on you except antiquity, Doughgod," says I. "I got uh chance for you to be uh chaperon for three swell females."

"My gorge ariseth at the mention of the sex," he states. "I'll nevermore be nothing to the calico-clad race, Hen. Not me! I been left at the preacher's."

"Listen, Doughgod!" says I, poking uh finger into his knee-cap, and speaking in uh whisper. "Listen to this and then dare to refuse. Did you ever hear of the Lost Cabin mine?"

Doughgod nods and sucks hard on his pipe.

"Listen. These three females inherited uh map uh that mine, and they're out here to locate it. Sabe? They orates that they're out here to hunt, so folks won't beat 'em to it. I saw that map, so I know what I'm talking about.

"What we wants you to do is to come along as uh chaperon, and claim that mine as soon as we finds it. Me and Muley and Telescope can't do it, 'cause everybody around here knows we never done no prospecting. We'll split the profits."

Doughgod studies the proposition for uh while and scratches his head.

"Why not steal that map and locate it ourselves?" he asks. "You know where she keeps it, don't yuh?"

"Uh-huh," I agrees. "But I can't steal it, Doughgod."

"Locked up?"

"In her stocking."

"Complicates things," states Doughgod. "Yes, sir, I reckon that certainly complicates things, but I'll go with yuh. I been looking for uh chance to get even with the species, and maybe this is the chance. They don't play square, Hen."

"Born to deceive honest men," I replies.

"Gosh, that mine's richer than Illinoy mud, too," whispers Doughgod, as we goes out, and I agrees.

There's one peculiar thing about Lost Cabin mines. No, I reckon I'd better say, two peculiar things. One is the richness of the ore and the other is the quantity of them. Every mining locality from Nome to Mexico and west to Butte is proud of at least three of 'em. Uh district without at least one Lost Cabin mine is no fit place for uh prospector, and should be viewed with distrust. I didn't know that there was one in our part of the State, but Doughgod has prospected uh long time, and he ought to know.

"You can't carry that demijohn, Doughgod," I states, when he arrives with his trusty steed.

"Hen," says he, "I'm uh disappointed person—love, war and politics—and I sure don't aim to include drouth in my repertoire."

It is almost dark when we spots the outfit camped on the bank of Roaring Lion Crick. There's two hosses what ain't been unsaddled, so I admits to myself that Telescope has beat me to camp with his half. We rides in and are greeted by Telescope and Muley.

Muley's got uh flour-sack tied around

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his waist, and has got dough from his hair to his heels. He rolls his hands together to get rid of some of it, and then shakes hands with Doughgod.

"Doughgod, you're uh jewel," states Muley. "Without you, old-timer, we couldn't get along. Can yuh cook?"

"You're welcome, and I can't," says Doughgod, filling his old pipe, and looking the outfit over. "How long do yuh reckon it will take for this trip?"

"Maybe uh couple uh weeks," says Telescope. "You ain't in no hurry, are yuh?"

"Two weeks, eh? I got an idea that beats that. Listen!"

The three of us gets up close and listens.

"Two weeks is too long. Some night we'll throw uh scare into her, and while she's out of 'em we'll steal it. How does that scheme sound to you, eh?"

Muley and Telescope looks at each other, mysterious like, and eases up close to Doughgod.

"Great!" whispers Telescope. "Great idea, eh, Muley?"

"Cleverest thing I ever heard of. Shake, Doughgod. I didn't think yuh had it in yuh."

Then Muley and Telescope gets me to one side, and Muley says—

"Hen, we got to get rid of Doughgod—he's crazy!"

"Uh-huh," I admits. "He ain't bad, though. Yuh see, he's only loco on one subject. When he got left at the church it put uh half-hitch on his brain, and ever since he's been laboring under the delusion that this fair but false one has got her feet in the stirrups of his favorite saddle and won't get out. Outside uh that he ain't no crazier than you two fellers. Humor him uh little and he won't bother none. Did yuh get the female, Telescope?"

"I got the best there was, Hen. Snow-shoe Annie."

JUST then Annie waddles out of the tent and pokes around to where we are.

"*Mamook piah,*" says Telescope, pointing at the fire and then at the grub-box. Annie looks at him and shakes her head.

"*Anah!*" says she, the same uh which clinches the argument.

"Now," says I, "you've gone and done yourself proud, Telescope. Here we got the prize possession of the Piegans on our hands, and it won't cook. Them females specified uh respectable married woman, and you brings Snow-shoe Annie."

"How do you know whether she's respectable or not?" he argues. "Also, I didn't steal her. I slips her uh shot uh pain-killer and made marks in the sand to show her that I know where there is more of the same, and I has to quirt my bronc every step of the way to keep up with her."

"But she ain't married," I insists.

"How do you know she ain't? I wouldn't be surprised if she was married to Captain John Smith before he met Pocahontas."

"I thought maybe yuh was going to try and pass her off as Doughgod's wife?"

"Me?" says he, surprised like. "Not me, Hen. Uh course I takes uh chance that my hunch is right, and introduces her as Mrs. Smith. I didn't specify no first name nor initials, but they can't blame me if the similarity uh names balls 'em up uh little."

"Can't none uh them females cook?" I asks.

"Nope. Miss Violet opines that she can make uh delicious salad dressing, but me and Muley can't find nothing with that label on it, so that lets her out."

I takes uh look at Annie, setting there by the fire, and sort uh wishes I was back at the Cross-J, with my feet under the long table in the cook-shack. Annie is so danged old that she can tell yuh who painted the Painted Rocks. According to her *wau-wau* she was the one who mixed the colors. She don't sabe English none, but she can decipher the label on uh lemon extract bottle.

When she's lit up she can dance every tribal hoochie-koochie from the "Planting Dance" to the "Wail of uh Wounded Warrior." Also she can sing. She's been practising on her Swan Song for one hundred Winters, according to her say so, and it takes her half the night to wail the first verse.

Annie is so bow-legged that the big toes on each foot is deformed from never being in contact with the earth.

Doughgod looks Annie over, sort uh interested like, and then come over to me and asks—

"What's the idea of the ancient klooch?"

"Don't speak so loud!" I cautions. "She knows where it is, too."

"The—the map?" whispers Doughgod.

"No, the mine. They hires her to help them locate it. Doughgod, we got to win

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Annie over to our side, so be kind to her. Miss Matilda said you was an unprepossessing looking gentleman."

"——!" he snorts, knocking the ashes out of that pipe against his heel, and filling up again. "She can't pull no wool over my eyes. No female will ever horn her way into my bosom again, Henry. I been left at the church—me! If this pilgrimage don't pan out the way we figures I'm going up to the forks uh Tin Cup Crick and go into the goat business with 'Harelip' Hansen. I'm soured on the flesh-pots. Sabe?"

"Harelip raising goats?" I asks, surprised like.

"Uh-huh. Yuh see, Henry, the rustlers discriminated in favor of his cows, so he goes into the sheep business. When trouble comes up between the sheep and cow men, all uh Harelip's sheep gets stampeded over uh cliff. Harelip argues that no rustler is going to steal uh goat and yuh can't kill the blame things by herding 'em over uh cliff. Harelip's uh wise old coot, believe me. He offers me uh partnership."

"It's uh mighty good business, Doughgod; take him up," says I.

He walks over to the fire, where Muley is trying to cook some supper, when out comes Matilda, and saunters over. She's packing uh slip uh paper in her hand, and when she arrives she orates thusly to Muley:

"Cook, we will have consommé, a rare roast of veal, shoe-string potatoes, rolls and coffee. You will open enough vegetables for a salad and bring me the necessary ingredients for the dressing. I will mix the dressing at the table. That will be about all, I guess."

Muley looks at her, foolish like, while he tries to roll uh cigaret with doughy fingers. He lights the sticky mess and takes uh puff or two.

"Ma'am," says he, polite like, "you finished your oration in becoming style. That sure will be about all!"

"Thank you," says she, and struts back to her tent.

"I wouldn't cook it for 'em," states Doughgod. "By cripes! I just wouldn't do it, Muley."

Muley rolls up that bunch uh dough, tobacco and paper and casts it into the fire. He unties the flour sack and it follers suit.

"Now," says he, "that sure is about all! I'm Lemuel Allender Bowles—puncher! I ain't no danged Eyetalian cook, and I don't care to listen to words uh wisdom from nobody. Sabe?"

That sure was some supper. Muley took uh can uh peaches, and sneaked off in the brush, while Telescope tries to appease the appetite of three female humans and uh Piegan squaw with uh can opener and some burned bannock. I divides uh can uh pork and beans with Doughgod.

If all the joy around our camp next morning was put in one bunch it wouldn't make uh happy peep for uh humming bird. After we gets packed up, me and Muley and Telescope gets together, and I starts conversing thusly:

"There comes uh time in the lives of every man when he shall shed the scales off his eyes and come out into the sunlight of wisdom. I been casting about in my mind and here is what I find: Three of us elects ourselves to act as pilots for three inoffensive females to the lair of elk, deer, antelope, moose, bear and bison. Bison is extinct—wild ones. The open season for elk, deer and moose opens September first. Antelope is protected, and bear ain't no fit target for uh woman. Now, what's the answer?"

"Hennery Peck," says Muley, removing his hat, and bowing low, "you're uh —— of uh guide. Why didn't yuh think sooner?"

"Conclusive but late," admits Telescope. "Maybe they'd admire to shoot uh prairie-dog or uh ground-hog."

"May I have a word with you?" asks Miss Matilda, who has come up behind us.

"Free speech is our motto, ma'am," bows Telescope. "It can never be said that uh Tolliver didn't give uh lady uh chance to ask questions."

"I just wanted to state," says she, "that our accommodations and comforts are not what we expected. We wish to secure our quota of game as soon as possible, and return to civilization. Are we nearly into the game country?"

"Yes'm," says I. "Almost. Just what would you admire to kill first? Have yuh any choice?"

"Well," says she, "we have been talking it over, and I believe we have a certain choice in the matter. Before we left we saw an animal mounted in a hotel lobby, and we admired it so much that we feel our

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efforts would be rewarded if we could secure a trophy like that."

"The name of that animal was?" asks Telescope.

"Mountain goat," says she, consulting a little book. "Yes, that was it. Could we secure one?"

"Uh-huh," says Muley. "Yes'm, yuh absolutely may. Yuh see, goats are easy to get—mostly always."

"Thank you," says she. "Now that we are agreed we may as well go to the place where they inhabit."

"Now," says Telescope, "ain't that the holy limit! Mountain goats! Why, there ain't uh mountain goat within uh hundred miles uh here."

"Simplifies things when we knows just what they want," says I. "Goats are more simple than buffalo or musk-ox. I reckon she can get uh goat if she wants to. Far be it from me to keep uh lady from getting uh goat."

"Suppose you leads her to the trophy," says Telescope, sort uh sarcastic like. "I'd sure admire to see yuh do it, Hen."

"Stick around," says I, as I forks my bronc. "I'll smell out that trophy for her."

DOUGHGOD gets on his bronc and rides beside me at the head of the caravan. We strings out along that trail like uh bunch uh Injuns, and I can't help feeling sorry for them women with the tender feet. Only they ain't walking.

"Is that mine supposed to be up Tin Cup way?" asks Doughgod, as we swings off up Lost Cow Cañon and gets into the timber.

"Up that way some place," I agrees. "I heard Miss Violet talking about yuh last night, Doughgod. She said you looked and acted like uh barbarian."

"Missourian," says he. "Women make me tired, Hen. They always use snap judgment thataway. I wish I could get my hands on that map!"

"You might suggest doing the family wash," says I. "Maybe she might forget and leave it inside some time."

Doughgod shakes his head, and looks back at the procession.

"Snow-shoe Annie knows where it is, too, does she?" he mumbles.

"Maybe I could get on the best side of her, and get her to tell where it is. Danged bad time to take her away from the reservation. Tomorrow the Piegans have uh big pow-wow, and they'll sure be looking for her to make medicine."

We camps for dinner on Tin Cup Crick and eats most of our meal out of tin cans. Snow-shoe Annie pulls the cork out of uh bottle uh tobasco sauce and drinks most of it before I can choke her off. Her tears of remorse ruins uh good can uh beans.

We camps near the forks of the crick that night, and there sure is one bunch uh tired females.

"I'd admire to be rolling into my little bunk at the Cross-J," states Telescope. "Dry-nursing females ain't no cinch job, if yuh asks me. All day long Miss Matilda has been discoursing with me on popular subjects. Who was Bernard Shaw, and where did he ever tend bar? Muley's been hogging the attentions of Miss Violet all day—danged poetical pup! Muley, did you recite her that poem yuh wrote about Snow-shoe Annie?"

Muley is busy with uh piece uh paper and the stub of uh pencil, and he just looks up and goes on writing.

"What's uh passion flower, Hen?" he asks, chewing the pencil.

"Commonly known as loco weed," says I. "Why do yuh ask?"

"Aw, I had something nice written to—well, here she is:

I knowed uh little shrinking bud,
Amid the flowers so rare,
And she cheered me through the silent midnight hour.
She was the sweetest little thing,
I loved that bud for fair,
That shrinking little——

"That's as far as I got. Passion flower sounds good, but I don't want to mix no loco weed up in uh thing like that. I can't say violet flower, 'cause it don't sound classy enough."

"Make it seltzer sour," says I. "You been drinking from the shrine uh love for so long that your stomach needs acid. You ain't done nothing but pour loving lies into Miss Violet's ears since we left this morning."

"I didn't lie to her," denies Muley. "Do yuh think I could look into her eyes and not be truthful?"

"Where do we go from here?" asks Telescope, the next morning.

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"We don't go no place," says I. "Right here is where we hunt."

"Is it near here?" whispers Doughgod, when Telescope laughs and walks over to the fire.

"I give him uh wink, and he grins like he was wise. I notices that he's acting friendly to Snow-shoe Annie. Annie was uh hardened old sinner when General Custer was playing with toy soldiers, so she don't pay much attention to Doughgod's softening attentions.

"I'm trying to get on the best side of her," explains Doughgod, when Telescope chides him for paying so much attention to the old dried-apple-face.

"We all do, Doughgod," grins Telescope. "Don't yuh always notice how I always keep on the windward side of her. I wonder if Annie ever had uh bath?"

"She knows where it is," states Doughgod.

Telescope looks at him for uh minute and then nods.

"Maybe. Anyway, she never gets into it."

Miss Matilda comes to me after a while and she's limping uh heap from the trip. She rubs herself on the spot where uh man's hip pocket is sewed on, and says:

"Guide, I greatly fear that the trip is not what we expected. The culinary department seems limited to canned articles and a species of burned bread. Our sleeping quarters are very poor, and our chaperons are not at all what I could wish for.

"This Mrs. Smith is the most peculiar person I ever met. She don't seem a bit companionable, and a little while ago I found her drinking the contents of an extract bottle. She attempted to bite me when I remonstrated with her. I must speak to her husband about it. Miss Violet and Olive are indisposed this morning, and agree that unless there is relief in sight we may as well abandon the outing."

"Ma'am," says I, "I'm uh heap sorry, but I figures that relief is in sight. Uh course if yuh wishes to hunt buffalo it will take some time, but if you just wishes to secure uh goat, we can make uh permanent camp right here and you can secure the limit."

"How many is the limit?" she asks.

"One. One goat is the limit."

"Well, we may as well prepare for a day in the piney woods. I will inform Violet and Olive of the fact."

I goes over to where Muley and Telescope are trying to win Doughgod's substance in uh three-cornered poker game, and sets down beside them.

"Sell uh goat and buy uh stack," advises Telescope.

"If you fellers was more guides and less tin-horn gamblers, you'd be preparing for a day in the piney woods," says I. "The eternal feminine wouldst hunt this day and date for the frisky mountain goat. What will we do—each guide one?"

"I'll guide Miss Violet," states Telescope.

"Over my prostrate carcass yuh will!" snaps Muley. "Being sort uh refined in my actions and talk, I feels that she's more at home in my company than in yours."

"The cards will decide," says I, and they did. I got Miss Matilda, Telescope draws Miss Violet and Muley is fated to pilot Miss Olive to the lair of uh goat. Doughgod went away when we started cutting the cards, and when I went down to inform the women of their guides I meets Miss Matilda, and she looks peevish.

"Mr. Smith is crazy!" she orates, loud like.

"What's he been doing?" I asks.

"He insulted me!" she snaps. "He wanted to help me put on my stockings!"

"Yes'm," I agrees. "He must be crazy. Don't let him do it."

She looks at me for uh moment, sticks her nose in the air, and beats it for the tent. She sure is sore about something. But that's the way with uh woman. Give them good advise and they turn it down like uh white chip.

That evening Miss Matilda comes to me with the complaint that we're losing valuable time.

"We've been here all day and haven't hunted a bit," she complains.

"Ma'am," says I, "the wind ain't been right today. Yuh always got to hunt goats by the smell. Sabe?"

"Would you please explain the smell?"

"It can't be done," I tells her. "It's like trying to describe the itch of uh woodtick bite. You got it, and you know how it feels, but you could spend the rest uh your life trying to tell how it feels and nobody would get the sensation.

"Maybe tomorrow the smell will come along and you'll be surprised how easy it is to smell of. It can't be classified under

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no heading, ma'am. It's just uh heathenish stink. If yuh like the smell of uh goat yuh can——"

"I understand," says she, and beats it for her tent.

"I suppose yuh was going to tell her another lie, eh?" says Muley.

"I was not. I was just going to tell her that in case she got stuck on the smell she could probably buy the socks you're wearing, Muley."

SWE DON'T no more than get to sleep that night before we're awakened some sudden like.

"*Hi-yah, Hi-yah, Hi-yah, ah-e, ah-e, ah-e, ah-e! E-e-e-e-e! Hi-yah, Hi-yah, Hi-yah, ah-e, ah-e, ah-e-e-e-e-e-e-e!*"

We unrolls from our blankets, and sets up.

"*Hi-yah, Hi-yah, ah-e, ah-e-e-e-e-e!*" it goes again, running from a squeaky tenor to uh choking sort of uh bass, and then into uh wail like the last sob of uh wounded fish.

"Whispering wolves!" snorts Telescope. "What's going on here? Sounds like uh Digger funeral."

"*Hi-yah, Hi-yah,*" it goes again, and we hears running feet, and into our midst comes them three females. They never stopped to dress. They looked like three suffering spirits looking for something to throw uh scare into. Over our recumbent forms they spills, and yells loud and plentiful.

"*Boof!*" One of them gets her foot under my neck and grabs my carcass like she was going down for the third time and I was the only straw in sight.

I manages to get uh strangle hold on her long enough to strike uh match, and looks into the features of Miss Matilda.

"Woman," says I, dropping the match, "you're uh fright!"

"*Hi-yah, Hi-yah, Hi-yah, ah-e, ah-e, ah-e-e-e-e-e!*"

Comes uh moment of suspense, and then Miss Matilda yells like uh cougar, and scratches me from eyebrow to chin with her toenails, and spins over to where Muley and Telescope is engaging the other two in deadly combat.

Suddenly the battle lulls, and I hears uh weak small voice, sort of appealing like:

"Help! Hel—p!"

"Help yourself," I hears Telescope grunt. "God helps them what helps themselves. Who took my drawers? No, Muley, for Gawd's sake don't scratch that match! Stop it, yuh danged fool! Ain't there no decency left on earth?"

The match is scratched—a whole handful of 'em, but it wasn't Muley, it was Doughgod.

He stands there peering at us from under that bunch uh flaming matches and waves some pieces uh cloth in his other hand.

"Hen," says he, holding them things toward me. "It wasn't there. I burglarized six pair and all I found was uh worn out bunion plaster. She must uh hid it."

"Let go uh me!" yelps Muley. "Telescope Tolliver, let go uh me! Set on your own lap, yuh skinny devil! I ain't got no pants on either!"

The matches mercifully went out and left us in darkness.

"Well!" exclaims Miss Matilda.

"It is now," agrees Telescope. "You ladies better go back to bed. You ain't exactly dressed for cool weather."

"But that—er—noise," stutters Miss Olive.

"That noise was—" begins Muley, and it starts again.

"*Hi-yah, Hi-yah, ah-e-e-e-e-e-e!*"

It's coming closer all the time, and we sees uh dumpy figure weaving our way in the dark.

I reckon all four of us men lights matches at the same time, and into the illumination waddles Snow-shoe Annie. Her hair is all sailing loose in the wind and her head is thrown back like she was studying astronomy. At every step she cuts loose uh *hi-yah*, and then flops her head forward to deliver the *ah-e, ah-e-e-e.*

She's so danged bow-legged that she waddles like uh duck, and in one hand she's swinging Doughgod's demijohn. She's so much interested in herself that she don't notice us. Them three females groups like uh statue uh "*Fright in Nightgowns*," and shivers and stares some industrious.

Annie weaves straight through our crowd and points for uh low-cut stump.

"*Hi-yah, Hi-yah!*" yelps Annie, in uh mounful wail, and just as she switches to the *ah-e's*, she gets both feet under the stump and stands on her head. The demijohn describes uh gurgling circle and lights on her neck.

The picture sort uh fades away, showing two pigeon-toed moccasins as uh last view.

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Comes the hearty snore, and the matches went out.

We herds them scared females back to bed, and as we moves back to our trampled beds I hears Miss Olive exclaim—

"I wonder what next?" and I puts in with her.

"I beg your pardon," we hears Miss Matilda yelp, and we turns back.

She's inside her tent, but is holding something on the outside.

Telescope sneaks up like uh bob-cat on uh cotton-tail, grabs the object and ducks back.

"There!" he snorts, after uh few seconds. "If I had my pants I'd be totally dressed. Never again do I sleep in my underclothes without nailing 'em on. I don't know how she got 'em, but she did."

"You never can tell anything about uh woman," remarks Doughgod. "I got on the best side uh Annie, lost all my hooch, and all I found was uh bunion-plaster."

"Doughgod," says Muley, "if I was you I'd take that plaster and strap it on my head. You're uh elegant chaperon, you are! Lighting matches thataway! What did yuh expect to see?"

"Nothing," replies Doughgod. "I looked and looked and all I found was that plaster —dang the luck!"

"I've heard of ranges being sheeped out, but you're the first person I ever knowed that was in that fix," states Telescope. "But I reckon he's on uh par with the rest of the outfit. Hunting mountain goats on uh cow range, and being chaperoned by uh locoed shepherd and uh hooch-swilling Piegan squaw. By the gods of all the Tollivers, if I ever gets back to civilization and sane people, there will I make my bed."

"And lie on it just like you've always lied," states Doughgod, as he waddles off to his blanket.

"Hen!" whispers Muley, after a while. "Hen, I wish you had your banjo here."

"What for?" I asks.

"Them females are afraid uh funny noises, and maybe yuh could stampede 'em with it. I got Telescope's pants."

THE next morning Miss Violet calls me to one side.

"I—I don't suppose you know where they are," she states, "but last night somebody took my—er———"

"Yes'm," says I. "I think I know what yuh mean. I'll ask Muley about 'em."

"Mr. Bowles?" she asks, surprised like. "Why, he don't——"

"No, he don't wear 'em, ma'am. He's uh souvenir hunter."

I went right to Muley and asked him to give Miss Violet's stockings right back to her.

"Her stockings!" snorts Muley. "My gosh! Where'd yuh get that idea?"

"She thanked me for going to ask yuh," says I. "That lets me out. I told her I would."

"Well, where in —— would I get her stockings?" he demands.

"Where'd Miss Matilda get Telescope's drawers?" I shoots right back at him, and he nods.

"You better tell her that you didn't get 'em," I advises, and Muley drifts over to their rag boodwah.

I finds Doughgod setting there by the fire and he sure is thinking deep-like. I sets down beside him and opens fire.

"You certainly done things up to the queen's taste last night, Doughgod. You got Miss Violet's stockings instead of Miss Matilda's. Why didn't yuh look what yuh was doing?"

"Aw ——!" he snorts, disgusted like. "How'd I know? Them things don't show no brands and they all looks alike. All I do know is this, Hen; I'm tired uh this locoed pilgrimage. It ain't getting no place. Annie lapped up all the joy uh life. Here comes the old mahogany-colored pelican now."

Annie waddles up to the fire and rubs her throat. She looks us over and croaks—

"Sick *la-tet.*"

"Uh-huh," agrees Doughgod. "I should think your head would ache. You blasted old leather-faced daughter of uh coyote!"

"I've often heard of the boasted chivalry of the West, but I think it is a myth," states Miss Matilda, who has come up behind us. "That's a horrid way to speak to a lady."

"Ma'am," says Doughgod, "Annie ain't no lady. She might have been about uh hundred years ago, but right now she's just uh rotting sign-post of uh vanishing race."

"Goodness!" squeaks Miss Matilda. "That's a pleasant way of speaking of one's wife."

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She strides back to her tent, with her nose in the air, and Doughgod stares at her until she's inside.

"Hen Peck, who did she mean?" he demands. "What person was that spectacled old hen talking about when she said one's wife?"

"How do I know?" I asks. "I ain't no mind reader."

Me and Doughgod sets there and smokes uh while, and pretty soon Miss Violet comes over to us and says:

"I wish you would come with me, Mr. Smith. Perhaps you could help us a little."

"Ma'am, I'm the original little helper," says I, before Doughgod has uh chance to speak.

"Thank you, but Mr. Smith is the one in a case like this. His wife just drank a large bottle of toilet water—actually drank every drop, and we don't know what to do. It might kill her!"

"Ma'am," states Doughgod, "if it does, tell me what it is and where I can get it, and I'll make yuh uh present of uh barrel."

"You're uh horrid old man!" exclaims Miss Violet. "Have you no feelings for your own?"

"I'm all the own I got," states Doughgod. "If that danged old shriveled-up piece uh animated whang-leather and thirst opines to drink concentrated essence uh nitric acid I'll chuckle with glee. Sabe?"

Miss Violet looks at us sort uh queer like, and then ambles back to her tent.

"I'm sick uh this layout," states Doughgod. "I been insulted seventeen times uh day, and I'm getting peevish. If something don't burst pretty soon I'm going to leave yuh in the lurch."

"I'm with yuh, Doughgod," says I. "We got to change our tactics. I overhears uh conversation the other day that kind uh puts uh different light on things. Miss Matilda can't find that map. Somewhere that piece of paper is waiting for the lucky man to come along and land uh million. It sure must be somewhere in their clothes."

Doughgod smokes, serious like for uh while, and then grins.

"Hen," says he, "some time ago you made uh suggestion that sounded foolish, but right now she looks like the goods. I'm going to see if she'll work out."

He wanders over toward the females' section of the camp. I sees Muley and Telescope setting under uh tree up on the side of the hill, so I wanders up there and sets down with them. Muley is busy with uh piece uh paper and the stub of uh pencil, and Telescope has got his shoulder blades wrapped around the shady side of the tree.

"Hennery," says Telescope, "did yuh ever stop to consider?"

"I never did. That'd make any man crazy. Why do yuh ask?"

"I been thinking. Here's you and me and Muley guiding three females from Paradise to nowhere after nothing. They don't know what they want and we ain't giving it to them. We had to steal an outfit, hand the hooch lure to the chaperon and lie like ——. We left the bed and board of the Cross-J for what? Again I asks in stentorian tones: What do we profit?"

"After splitting nothing three ways I don't see where the profit is, myself," I states. "We'll have to share with Doughgod and Snow-shoe Annie, too, I reckon."

If they was all like Miss Violet it would be different," says Telescope. "Miss Matilda must uh been created out of uh spare rib."

Muley mumbles uh prospector's cussword, and we eases around to see him.

"What yuh doing, Muley? Writing an ode to uh goat?" I asks.

"Wish I had uh proper kind of word to rhyme with dell," complains Muley.

"Let's hear it and maybe we can help yuh," suggest Telescope, and Muley recites:

> The flower of the mountain-side smells sweet,
> When you crush 'em all to thunder with your feet.
> Sweeter than these words can e'er be wrote.
> But the violets of the dell——

"That's as far as I can get," wails Muley. "Dang the luck, I don't seem to grasp the right word somehow."

"That's easy," I replies. "I ain't nothing but uh banjo-playing guide, but I sees at uh glance what yuh needs. She appears to me that this is the stuff:

> But the violets o' the dell
> Smell much sweeter, sure as——,
> When your nose is used to smelling of uh goat.

Muley looks at me with sad eyes and reaches for uh rock, but Telescope blocks the throw.

"Spare the child, Muley!" commands Telescope. "You're the most unappreciative hombre I ever met. Hen gave yuh the right word, didn't he?"

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Telescope lets go of Muley's arm and stares at the camp.

"Well," says he. "I reckon the hunt is about to start."

OUT of the tent comes them females and they're organized. I know from the looks uh things that Miss Matilda is packing that cross between uh mountain-howitzer and uh shotgun; Miss Violet has uh .22 and Miss Olive mishandles uh single-barrel shotgun.

They're milling around in front of their tent, when out comes Doughgod, loaded down with plunder, and weaves off down to the crick bank, where he proceeds to get busy. Annie waddles along with him and sets down on the bank.

"For the love of Luther!" howls Telescope. "Look at Doughgod, would yuh!"

"My gosh!" yelps Muley. "Doughgod's opened uh laundry!"

He sure had. His sleeves are rolled up and he's sorting clothes some industrious. He talks with Snow-shoe Annie for uh minute, and then she waddles back to the fire and carries uh can of hot water out to him.

Miss Matilda watches Doughgod, at uh distance for uh while, and then tucks her gun under her arm and walks over to him. She leans over and sizes up Doughgod's work, while them other two appears busy reading out of that little note-book.

The three of us rolls on the ground and gets out uh breath.

"Ain't that the limit!" howls Telescope. "'Doughgod and Snow-Shoe Annie, Washing Done!' Wait 'till Paradise hears—my ——!"

"Goat!" says Muley, sort uh foolish like. "Goat!"

"Add an 's' to make it plural, Muley," replies Telescope. "It's two goats."

"Mountain goats," states Muley.

"Goats in the mountains," I corrects, and they nods.

Them two white goats have wandered up between the tents and are standing there looking the place over. One of them is uh heap interested in uh empty can, but the other don't see nothing but the trio on the crick bank. The other two females are still busy with that book, but the goats don't pay no attention to them.

"Look who has came," exclaims Telescope, pointing beyond camp, and we sees uh man coming on hossback. He rides near the tents and slides off his hoss.

"Looks like Al Sullivan," says I.

"Yes, that's Al," agrees Telescope. "He's Injun agent. Wonder if he came to see where Annie was?"

We don't have time to wonder much, 'cause them goats get busy. Seems to me that uh goat has uh deductive mind. Now, that goat could have hit Doughgod, personally, at most any time since it came to camp, 'cause he's been in the proper position all along, but it just seemed to wait until Miss Matilda leaned over Doughgod to see how he's handling the wash.

"*Ba-a-a.*" That goat takes three little buck jumps, to sort uh get uh good start, and then he covered the intervening space like uh white streak.

"*Boof.*"

All we saw of Doughgod was one boot, as he went into Tin Cup Crick, but we got more of uh view of Miss Matilda than any of us will ever get again.

The goat just bowed his neck and danced around Snow-shoe Annie, sparring for uh chance to sell her uh bath ticket.

We hears uh whoop, and there goes Al Sullivan over after that goat. Uh man can't run very fast with high-heeled boots on, and Al wasn't exactly built for speed, but he sure seemed bent on saving that antiquated aborigine.

He makes uh dive for the goat, gets it around the neck, and then tries to set down and hold it in his arms. I don't reckon that Al ever saw that other goat or he wouldn't have got in uh stooping position.

Anyway, it's a question which got to him first—the goat or the charge uh shot that Miss Olive cut loose. Comes uh yell, loud and long, and uh dull thud, and we sees Al Sullivan, Snow-shoe Annie and two goats go to swell the majority from Tin Cup.

"*Haw! Haw! Haw!*" howls Telescope, bending over at the waist, and holding on to his ribs to keep from busting. "Mountain goats! Oh, my grandmother's cat's ——!"

Imitation is one of the worst things a man can do. Usually I'm original in thought and deed, but once in uh while I forgets myself and imitates others—so does Muley.

We doubles over, just like Telescope did, to ease our lungs. More goats!

Something hits me so hard in the seat of

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the pants that I reaches for the second limb of uh tall tree, but misses and falls among more goats. Say, there was more 'but' around there than ever was used in pessimistic conversation since the English language was adopted. I got my share.

One old gray-whiskered feller comes along and snorts in my face and it makes me sore. Uh man ought to hold onto his temper. I'm of uh usually calm and collected nature, but that made me mad, and I got right up and reached for uh rock. Do yuh understand? I—reached—for—uh—rock!

Absolutely and irrevocably leaned over to pry loose uh rock, thereby issuing invitations to all goats. They came to my party.

As I gave that goat-party uh chance to set 'em up on the other alley I saw uh bunch uh riders coming into camp, and I recognizes it as a sheriff's posse.

I remembers them borrowed Flying-H, Bridle-Bit, Figure-Eight, Bar-X and Lazy-Y horses, and gets sick under my belt. I felt like Patrick Henry did when he said, "Give me liberty or give me death!" only I didn't specify no substitute.

I prys myself loose from uh goat which seemed inclined to eat my ear off, and hobbles and limps off up the gulch away from camp.

I knew that our broncs were feeding up that way, and I don't even hanker for uh bridle or saddle. I just wants to lie on my belly on uh hoss, and drift away from females with the call of the red gods in their veins—and goats.

Muley and Telescope has the same ideas and I finds them trying to coax their broncs to ride in uh comfortable position. Telescope turns to me, as I swings my bronc close to him, and stutters—

"Did—did she get her tut-tut-trophy?"

"I think so," I yells back at him. "She'll have to dry it out before she can stuff it."

There ain't no more conversation. We manage to get them unbridled broncs headed up the hill, when we hears uh voice behind us—

"Hey!"

We turns and sees Doughgod Smith. He looks like he had been run through uh sluice and then curried with uh rake. He stands there holding onto his floating ribs, and the dirty water runs off his scraggly hair and drip off his mustache.

"Don't hey us!" yells Telescope. "Go back to your goat, you—laundress!"

"The—the Injun agent came for Annie," he informs us, foolish like. "The—the sheriff asked for you, Hen."

I don't argue in a case like that. I just hammered my bronc with my hat, and the three of us hit straight up the ridge, and runs square into Harelip Hansen. He's standing there on the ridge, uh little decrepid hombre, with uh face that resembles uh moth-eaten mattress.

"Looking for goaths," he states. "Theen any goaths?"

He spat copiously at uh lizard and squints at us from under his bushy eyebrows.

"Goaths. Theen um?"

We looks at each other and then back at Harelip.

"Goats?" asks Telescope. "Goats?"

Harelip takes another shot at the lizard and squints at us some more.

"I thaid goaths!" he snaps. "Gee-o-ah-ths! You're uh lot uh danged foolths!"

"Boys," says Telescope, "take off your hats to uh man what knows what he's talking about. He's uh novelty. Let's git uh going."

"Where we going?" asks Muley, painful like.

"We'll go—uh—where'll we go?" asks Telescope. "We might go down to see if that stove has come in yet, but ——"

"Don't!" says Muley, easing himself back on that bronc's hips. "Don't use that word, Telescope! Let the goats do it."

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Claymore

by Arthur D. Howden Smith

A Four-Part Story
Conclusion

Author of "Contraband Matrimony," "Fair Salvage," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE HEATHER

EVEN the skies wept that dreary day at Ruthven when we knew our cause was lost. It meant ruin, exile, forfeiture of lands, attainting of titles, the block for some, suffering and misery for all. One by one we paid our last respects to Lord George, and the army that had threatened two kingdoms was disbanded, dribbling away hour by hour until a mere handful remained.

I stayed to the end that I might help Lord George in the winding up of his work. When the last incriminating paper had been burnt and the muster-rolls of Prince Charles's army were a heap of ashes on the hearth, he turned to me with a sad smile on his ugly face.

"There lies our work, lad," he said, "the good, the bad and the indifferent, 'tis all leveled in that sooty pile. 'Twas what I had lived for, and—'tis ashes. By so narrow a margin is success barred from failure. Had it not been for thus and so—who knows?—we might have beaten Cumberland, and then Britain had been ours."

"There will be many a brave song and tale of what we have done," I answered, striving for cheerfulness.

"Ay, and you will hear them. You are young. Your life lies before you. This has been a wonderful experience to you, a test of character and capacity. Despite what you lose, boy, you have gained more. But I! Remember, I was out in the Fifteen, a lad like yourself. I was out again in Nineteen. This was my last chance.

"Victory—and I had been among the great around the throne! Defeat—and I face two prospects: the headsman's block or exile. One way leads me to Tower Hill, my grinning skull set on Temple Bar for fat Londoners to shiver at, my limbs spread broadcast, so that at Judgment Day even an all-wise Providence would find difficulty in scooping dust from Mother Earth and saying: 'Here is George Murray.' The other way——"

He shuddered and strode to the hearth, stooping to warm his hands over the smoldering embers.

"The other way," he repeated dreamily. "Yes, I see that, too. Ghent, mayhap, or Bruges, some little town in North France, now and then a trip to Paris, an old age of petty economies, baffled hopes and sore memories."

He straightened up suddenly, and a new ring came into his voice.

"I would choose the first," he cried.

There was no answer I could make. His nature was too ruggedly honest, too great of soul, to haggle over misfortune. His stern candor realized fate's portion for him, and accepted it.

He walked to a window and looked forth, hands clasped behind him, his immense figure outlined against the light.

"Ah, well," he sighed, "'tis finished. A brave fight well fought, one's duty done. So be it. Enough of these maunderings."

He wheeled abruptly and crossed the room to me, dropping a big hand on my shoulder.

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"God speed you, lad," he said soberly. "Think well of George Murray, if you may. I—I have loved you. You are as I hope I was when young. Make more of your life than I have done. And let yourself not be led astray by false babblers. The Stuart cause is wrecked. There will never be another rebellion. Make your peace, if you can, and when you have made it, abide by it!"

"Sir, I will observe all that you advise," I assured him earnestly. "But it may be you will lead an army again in some other country, and I hope I shall be by your side."

"No, no," he replied. "I am done with fighting. If I cannot fight for mine own country, I will fight for no other."

AND so I left him, that splendid, honorable gentleman, who strove so hard to attain an impossible goal, whilst others bickered and caballed; whose every motive was besmirched by the envious and whose indomitable will was balked by the littleness of the Prince for whom he sacrificed his all. 'Twas many a long month before I was to hear of him again, making the best of that fate he had dreaded the worst—exile.

Outside in the straggling street I encountered Sheila and David, sheltered from the rain under a low wall.

"Where are your people?" I asked her, for several score of her clansmen had rejoined the army, when the order for dispersal was received.

"We have sent them off," she answered. "David and I will have waited to bid you farewell."

"Farewell?"

"Ay."

Her eyes grew misty as she reached out a small brown hand.

"You will have been a true friend to us of the Clan Ross, and—and—it will not be easy to part. But I am thinking your way will not be our way."

"Why, what do you mean?" I exclaimed.

"Sure," she said, "you must know David and all our people, myself included, will be hunted like stags. Scotland will be no place for those that can escape it."

David corroborated this with a nod.

"And you think I will be going somewheres else?" I demanded.

"You will maybe win back to England," she returned. "If you have gold it can be done. And there you may lie hid with your uncle, till he can get you a pardon."

I laughed aloud.

"Do you really believe that I will leave you?" I asked.

She looked uncomfortable.

"You will not be thinking we have evil thoughts of you?" she begged. "Why would you not be wishful to return to your own land, where you may be safe? Sure, we are glad you can go—are we not, David?"

"Ay, verra glad," agreed David solemnly.

"Well," said I, with much amusement, "I am sorry to disappoint the two of you, but I am just not going."

"Not going?"

Sheila's eyes opened very wide.

"No, I am not going. And I hope you are not anxious to have me desert you."

I pretended to work myself up into a passion.

"You are a nice pair of friends for a man to have, ready to believe, without reason or excuse, that he will go off and abandon you when the first serious danger comes! I should have expected differently of you."

"But you will not be kenning what I mean," Sheila pleaded, almost in tears. "We will not be having a roof over our heads. I go now to Slioch, but Gairloch or some other like him will soon give it to the torch, and we must gae to the heather. That will mean cold nights and hard fare, the Redcoats—and worse, Gairloch's people—always at our heels."

"Well, you will have to do it, will you not?"

"But that is different. I am the chief of my clan. I must do what I can to advise my people and save them from harm. You are an Englishman; our life is strange to you——"

"You gave me the right to wear the tartan of the Clan Ross," I reminded her reproachfully.

I thought this would touch her, and it did; but not as I had expected.

"I knew it, I knew it!" she cried to David. "Did I not say he would never flinch? Frank will be a true blade. There is no brittle in him. Oh, Frank, I am that glad I could weep."

"But—but what is it?" I gasped in astonishment. "Are you mad or am I?"

"No, no, 'tis only that this great gaby David will have been wrong, as I was sure

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he was. But he said it was no more than fair we should give you a chance to leave us, if you wished——"

"The idea of leaving you never entered my mind. Moreover, I could not leave you, if I would."

"How is that?"

"The morning of the battle, after the sight had come on him, Ian Dhu laid a command upon me to see you safe from all perils."

"Save us!" breathed David. "A deeing mon's orrderrs! I wadna hae 'em on me for a guid penny—ma ain father's, nor anybody's."

Sheila was genuinely distressed.

"Oh, but that is not right!" she objected. "It is not fair that you should be saddled with responsibility for me because of something Ian Dhu said. I would not——"

"Well," I said resignedly, "it seems to be necessary I should admit I would still be for forcing my company on you, even without Ian Dhu's orders. And let me remind you, 'twould be more than unkind for you to hinder me in carrying out a dying man's wishes. It might expose me to his curse."

"That will be so," said Sheila in hushed tones. "David, he must come with us."

"It isna in ma mind to prevent him," answered David. "Thee wull be a gey guid company for hidey-hunting in the heather."

"It would not matter what you said," I declared. "I am coming. That was my intention from the first, and you might as well make the best of it."

Sheila caught hold of my arm, and a rosy smile lighted her face.

"That will be what I expected," she exclaimed, giving me a comradely squeeze. "And you will be fine and ashamed of yourself, will you not, David?"

"Ay," said he, somewhat sheepishly. "But Chisholm wull ken ma thocht."

"That will I," I assented, heartily, and we clasped hands. "And now for plans. Shall we buy horses?"

"Nae," interposed David. "We wull be gangin' where nags canna gang—forby wi' nags ye draw every mon's eye upon ye. Shank's mare wull be our gait."

Sheila agreed in this judgment, so the question of equipment was dismissed. We had arms, our plaids and as much food as the limited facilities of Ruthven could supply—a bag of meal and a trifle of salt. For the rest, we must rely upon what we could purchase as we traveled or could shoot in the hills. We marched by ourselves, because a small party was less conspicuous, and we did not care to have it noted that the Chief of Clan Ross was following a certain route.

THE country was seething with excitement. Lookouts watched every road and sheeptrack. Muskets and claymores were being hidden in the thatch of cottages or in pits dug on the moors; wounded men were being transferred to caves in the hills; persons whose position or celebrity had identified them conspicuously with the rising were taking measures to procure safe retreats in remote districts. Every one realized 'twas but a question of time before the English would be amongst them—but none estimated correctly the severity of the punishment that was to be meted out to the disaffected clans. Had the Highlanders known the torments that awaited them, I believe they would have died to the last man sooner than have submitted.

One incident stands out in the eventless record of our journey north. We were tramping by the head of Loch Ness, shortly after passing the ruins of Fort Augustus, when a single horseman approached, spurring his worn mount as though life depended on it.

As he drew nearer we saw 'twas Murray of Broughton, Prince Charles's Secretary of State, who had been absent on a political errand since the day before Culloden fight. Ashy-white, with hectic fever-spots under his high cheek-bones and cracked lips that he moistened continually with his tongue, he looked the picture of hag-ridden fear.

He would not have stayed for us, but we blocked his path and perforce he must draw rein.

"Where do you ride, Mr. Secretary?" asked Sheila.

"I do not know," he answered dazedly. "I—can you tell me is the country safe south of here?"

"We have but just come from Ruthven in Badenoch," I told him.

"And Cumberland has not yet forced the lower passes?"

"Not that we have heard."

He fidgeted in the saddle.

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"I would I knew what to do," he muttered. "I have tried to find the Prince, but none has news of him."

"Why do you ride south, Mr. Secretary?" queried Sheila again. "That will be the wrong direction for safety."

"I can not bide the hills back there." He gestured with one of his twitching hands at the frowning bens rolling away behind him. "They crowd me so. I can not breathe. They hang over me at night. I choke. It is cold—and the rain!"

He coughed.

"It catches me in the lungs. I shall have a congestion, if I remain. I know not what to do. In the hills I sicken. I must go south. The Prince has gone, none knows whither. He has abandoned me. What am I to do? 'Every man must look out for himself,' he said. How am I to look out for myself? Each way I turn death awaits me."

"Ye wull be feared," said David contemptuously.

Murray whirled upon him with the petulant anger of the physically weak man.

"And if I be? Is that not a tribute to my reasoning power? My God, any man of sense should be afraid in times like these, with engagements broken right and left, and the ones that should hang together looking each to his own safety!"

"But if you ride south you will surely be caught," I told him.

He gave me a queer look, and picked up his reins.

"I have friends to the southwards in Badenoch and Atholl. At the least, I may find shelter there."

"But if you are caught, it will mean death, Mr. Murray," said Sheila pityingly.

He stared down at his long white hands.

"It may be, it may be," he replied. "Well, I would rather die on the scaffold than some other ways I know of."

And without a word of farewell, he spurred on his lagging horse and galloped away southward. Each of us, who watched his huddled figure dwindle in the leaden distance, had a feeling of misgiving. Did Broughton know at that time the traitor's rôle he was to play? Was he then cogitating in his brain the infamous bargain by which he won life and freedom in exchange for the lives and freedom of scores of others? I can not say; but my guess is that he did, that he was.

I wish I might tell of the few days we spent at Slioch, a fair old house, with wondrous prospects of the North Minch and the hills. 'Twas during those days I first saw Sheila dressed in woman's raiment, kerchief on breast and her straight, sinewy figure concealed beneath billowing petticoats and flounces.

And—ask me not why, for a man's mind in these channels works as obscurely as a maid's—there dawned in me a new conception of her, a faint visualization of a Sheila I had not known before, a Sheila that might be all feminine, alluring, provokingly mysterious, sweetly remote.

Time passed quickly, for there was much to be done. But I think we were both relieved when the dreaded message came on a night early in May. Gairloch, with a body of English regulars and dragoons, was at Stroan.

Sheila heard the news in silence, then went to her harpsichord that stood open in a corner of the Great Hall.

"We will be come to the parting of the path, Frank," she said. "From now on we will be hunted beasts. Our beds will be the heather or holes in the ground. And Slioch —Slioch will be a home for bats and owls!"

She ran her fingers over the keys in a snatch of haunting melody, and sang:

> Farewell to Glen Slioch,
> The nightwind is sighing,
> Your windows gap empty,
> Your hearthfire is dying.
> Oh, home of the Ross,
> Now the wolf sets his paw
> On the sill of your threshold—
> Your sons are no more!

With a sob she let her head sink down upon the instrument.

"Oh, Frank," she murmured, "I will be landless and an outlaw! With a price on my head!"

What I should have answered I know not, for at that instant David appeared in the doorway.

"All wull be ready," he called. "Sheila, don your kilts. We must be awa'."

When she came back she was the Sheila I had known of old, the boy-woman, barekneed and lissome, jaunty and graceful.

"Come your ways, Frank," she summoned me, no trace remaining of her tears. "We will be off to the heather. And I am thinking it will not be so bad—if the nights be but warm!"

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CHAPTER XXIV

WHAT HAPPENED UNDER BEN FIONN

YES, there could be no doubt of it. The declining rays of the sun, slanting overhead, were caught on shifting steel that moved across the brow of Cairn Balloch. From my berth in the heather I even saw the bonnets of the watchers as they peered at the mass of Ben Fionn upon whose slopes I lay. They were hot on the scent, with a vengeance.

A burst of unreasoning hatred possessed me, and I drew forward my musket. A bullet dropped just below those flickering gun-barrels might find its mark. 'Twas worth trying, in any event. Hell's curses on the fiends! Were they insatiable as their master for fresh blood?

I was cuddling the stock against my shoulder, wondering would the charge carry the distance, when Sheila crawled to my side.

"Is it mad that you are, Frank?" she remonstrated. "Put down your gun. A shot, and we should be discovered."

"It seems we are like to be discovered soon enough," I replied sullenly, pointing through the aperture in the heather that had been my peep-hole. "And David has been gone for four days!"

"Yes it will be they—the watchers," she said, with a slight shiver. "But as for David—do not be fearing. They could never take him."

Aye, but mayhap he finds he can not come back to us. What then? We are down to the last flask of water."

Her brow knitted in thought.

"Well, we will wait this night. If he does not come, we must do what we may to get free."

Her coolness shamed my reckless ire, and I lay silent beside her, watching the sunset afar in the west. 'Twas very splendid—in contrast to our lot. For three months, since we had fled from Slioch, the pursuit had never slackened. Gairloch and his bloodhounds, with the English, followed us wherever we went. Caves and sea-rocks, forests and moors, had furnished our hiding-places, and from each in turn our trackers had chivied us.

'Twas a vastly different Sheila beside me from her who had set forth so blithely upon this long adventure. Her clothing was in rags; her body was thin from toil and hunger; her knees and limbs were scratched and cut. But she did not whimper or complain, and her eyes were as ready as ever to smile down misfortune.

Yet she sighed a little at the glowing colors of the sunset.

"It will make me think of hot roasted meat and French wines and a warm fire," she murmured. "Do you feel that way, Frank?"

"A pox on your imagination!" I snapped ill-temperedly. "Shall we try the larder in comparison with it?"

"What a bear a man will be when he is hungry!" she mocked. "Come, and you shall have what is left—a shoulder of mutton, long hung and tender; fair white bread and kebbock cheese, and——"

Before I could assail her she had slid over the edge of the corrie that was our refuge, and ran, twisting and dodging, toward the clump of vegetation in one corner that concealed the low entrance to our cave.

"A parley, Frank," she begged, flushed and starry-eyed, as she turned at bay. "I will have roused you from your sulks, and for the teasing you may forgive me."

"May I, indeed? Do you recall I was once near to whipping you?"

"Great bully that you were!"

"I may do it yet."

She laughed gleefully.

"You put me in mind of the savage men I have read about in America. Would you really beat me?"

"I will if I do not soon have food."

"It shall be ready for you in the minute," she promised, pretending terror.

We entered the cave on our hands and knees, but within we could stand almost upright, and it was warm and dry. The farther recess was screened off by a plaid into a private chamber for Sheila. I—and David, when he was with us—slept across the entrance.

"No fire?" she asked, as she went to the wooden box we called the larder.

"'Tis dangerous."

"You will be right. Well, then, we must have crowdy again. But we will be making believe we are supping at St. James's with his Royal Highness, will we not?"

And though 'twas too dark to see, I knew she was smiling cheerfully at me.

"Do you suppose they have yet caught the Prince?" I remarked, more by way of keeping up conversation than for other purpose.

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"God forbid!" she cried. "He should be safe away by this."

"He was hunted from shelter to shelter, the last time David heard. When folk like us are so mercilessly persecuted, how can he escape?"

"You will not be happy in your thoughts, Frank," she reproved me. "Here is the crowdy."

She set an iron pot between us, and with pieces of wood we had fashioned into rude semblances of spoons we ate the poor mess of oatmeal and cold water it contained.

"'Tis easy housekeeping, at the least," I suggested, when we had finished. "No dishwashing—for there are no dishes, and no water, even if there were dishes."

"We will be falling into bad habits," Sheila rebuked me staidly. "It is not good for folk to be living like the animals."

But instantly she reached out and put her hand on my shoulder.

"Oh, I would not be meaning those unkind words," she protested. "It is you who are risking these dangers and hardships for my sake."

"Nonsense!"

"It is no nonsense. You might have reached France by this, with your store of guineas that are going for bread and meat for David and me."

"And how could they be spent better?" I retorted. "As for my winning to France, I doubt it, and sure, I would sooner have drowned in the sea than have left you and David."

"That will be for the reason of Ian Dhu's wish?" she questioned softly.

"Nay, if Ian Dhu had laid no commands upon me I should have stayed."

We fell silent. 'Tis curious how much two people can be silent when together and still not be out of touch, one with the other.

"Shall we wait outside for David?" asked Sheila suddenly.

"If you like."

She led the way from the cave, and we sat in the heather close by the hole, so that we might take shelter, if aught untoward happened.

'Twas a glorious night. The August sky was satin-sheeny, an unbroken expanse of smooth blue damask, flecked with twinkling silver stars, and the darkness was a tender embrace.

Sheila yawned daintily.

"I am very sleepy," she said. "Will you be minding if you take the first watch alone?"

"No. I have no desire for sleep."

She curled up like a baby or a puppy and was slumbering a minute after I had spoken. I sat with my musket across my knees, watching her. In that dim light the hollows in her face were rounded out, the eyelashes lay like fine lace on her cheeks. Her lips were slightly parted, and her breast rose and fell very gently. She might have been in her bedchamber at Slioch, surrounded by vassals and servants, instead of atop a lonely mountain with one man for company.

I fell to thinking how we had first met, of the dark-eyed, furious handsome boy in Derby I had threatened to horsewhip, of the retreat from England, of Clifton Hall fight and our ride together, of all the hundred incidents in the last few crowded months.

A year past I had been living the dull routine of mine uncle's household, such thoughts as carried me beyond Chisholm Castle scarce reaching as far as London. And now here was I, after experiencing hazards and exploits sufficient for a lifetime, in the far northern Highlands, mounting guard over the fairest maid in the two kingdoms!

Sheila smiled in her sleep, as if she knew my thought, and her lips murmured something I strained forward to catch.

BUT the low call of a moor-hen broke the stillness, and the past was forgotten. 'Twas the signal by which David announced his approach, and I leaned over Sheila, pressing my finger on her lips. She sat up immediately, hands twitching at her unruly hair.

"The moor-hen," I whispered.

Again the call came from some point outside the corrie.

Sheila pursed her lips and answered it thrice. A pause—and twice it was repeated.

"It will be David!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet.

Heavy footsteps approached, and presently David's big figure loomed in the darkness. Sheila's keen eye was first to detect the unsteadiness of his gait and she flew to his side.

"What will it be, David?" she demanded eagerly. "Are you tired?"

"Aye," he said dully. "Fair worn."

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I relieved him of the small bundle he carried, and we crawled into the cave. Then I hung my plaid across the entrance and struck flint and steel to our chiefest luxury—a bit of candle end. As the light flared up, Sheila gasped.

"There will be blood on his arm! David, have you been shot?"

He sat down heavily against the cave wall.

"Nae, it wull be naught but steel."

"How will it have happened?"

"I wull tell ye whiles I get ma breath. Hae ye water?"

I handed him the scant supply remaining in our bottle, and he drank feverishly.

"We maun gang awa' frae this," he said abruptly.

"Tomorrow?" I replied.

"Nae, the nicht—if it be not too late already."

"We saw watchers on Cairn Balloch," said Sheila, "but surely, there is no need of starting tonight."

"You are in no condition to travel," I pressed. "Come, David, be willing to hear sense."

"Ma worrds are sense," he returned doggedly. "Gairloch's men ye saw yon wull be sweeping Ben Fionn wi' the morrow's morrn."

"Are you sure?"

"The mon gied me this—" he touched his shoulder—"tellet me. Wi' persuasion," he added grimly.

"But where can we go?" asked Sheila. "This was the last place—and the safest."

"I dinna ken. But any place wull be more safe than this. We micht gang to Lochiel's country. He wad hide us."

Sheila unsheathed her dirk.

"Whilst we will be talking, let me look at that arm," she said. "Frank, do you pour out what water there is into the pot."

She cut away the blood-drenched sleeve, and revealed an ugly dirk wound, slicing downward from the shoulder. Then she washed and dressed it and put on a bandage compounded of some linen stuff she tore from her own person. The whole she wrapped in strips of plaid, and bound against his side.

As she worked, David told his tale in full. He had blundered upon one of Gairloch's watchers in the heather. They had fought, and in throwing the man David had been dirked. Then, to use his own phrase, he had "persuaded" his victim to reveal Gairloch's plans.

"Dinna speer me why," he concluded, "but Gairloch wull hae kenned where ye micht be wi'in a space o' three-fower miles this way or yon. He wull hae dragoons to help him sweep the country, and they wull-na leave a hidey-hole uncovered."

"But you will be in no condition to walk again this night," interposed Sheila. "Let us take our chances here."

"We canna," he answered simply. "For ain reason, in the fecht I lost ma water-bottle. We maun gang to water, if we gang naewhere else. The nicht is shorrt, and we hae a lang road befower us."

By dint of united argument we persuaded him to sleep until an hour after midnight. This brief rest seemed to revive his strength, and he led the way from the cave apparently as fresh as we were. David's immense frame enabled him to withstand privations that would have exhausted weaker men.

An hour's eventless scrambling took us to the foot of Ben Fionn, and we entered a dark, boulder-strewn defile. At the end of this we ascended a cliff and followed the insecure foothold of a ledge, which brought us on to the flank of another mountain south of Ben Fionn. But the stars were beginning to pale, and the faint scream of a whaup sounded behind us.

"What was that?" whispered Sheila.

"A mon," replied David, and hurried on faster than ever.

At the bottom of the second mountain we forded a tiny stream and struck up a glen which was shrouded in a dense growth of forest trees. Closer and closer grew the trees, narrower and narrower the way. For a while we heard the babbling of the little burn we had forded. When this died away the silence became funereal. Not a branch stirred. Only now and then on distant hillsides, out of view, whaups cried with a shrill insistence that was singularly unnatural.

HOW it came I do not know. We were pushing ahead at a dog-trot, despite the unevenness of the ground. There was a thud of feet, an outburst of wild cries—and a mob of kilted men flowed around us. They might have shot us down from their ambush, but they elected to charge with the cold steel. We three fired in their faces, hurled our muskets as they

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closed and grouped together, Sheila betwixt David and me.

There was not time for talk.

"We maun hack oot at the starrt off," David gasped as he drew his claymore.

I did not hear him speak again. His crippled left arm prevented him from using his target, and his sword had to be shield as well as weapon. But he fought—aye, even as his father had fought in the last great fight on Culloden Moor. His blade dripped blood from point to hilt, and his assailants hesitated. But instantly there was a reinforced rush at me, and I was put to it, not alone to defend myself, but to prevent my sword from being wrested from me by men who seemed not to care for wounds or death, if they might take me unharmed. In my desperation, I dropped my target and fought with dirk and claymore, slashing at every hand that reached for my weapons. The next thing I knew I missed the pressure of Sheila's lithe body against my back, and she sobbed aloud:

"Oh, they will have killed him! They stabbed him below his guard!"

I swept my point in a half-circle, disengaged, and faced about. David was prostrate on the ground, a dirk in his heart, and Sheila knelt by him, heedless of the blades clashing above her bonnet. Then a hand slipped over my shoulder and fastened upon my right wrist. Ere I could break free a second hand gripped my left wrist, my legs were grappled and I was hurled down beside David.

When the breath was back in my lungs I was standing on my feet once more, and Sheila with me. David lay as he had fallen, a calm, peaceful look on his face under the stars. The man who had stabbed him was cleaning the dirk that had ended his simple unselfish life.

There was something familiar about the murderer—his absurdly bowed legs, his clammy face, with fierce, evil eyes and a single forelock of black hair pasted flat on his forehead.

"Aweell," he observed coolly, "wha' kens where auld gossips wull meet! But I canna just say ye hae been ower kindly to me."

He was Crooked Sawney.

"A braw fine chase ye hae gied us," he went on, leisurely polishing his dirk-blade. "But Sawney never loses the scent—if it starrts frae Slioch."

Sheila stared at him with a horror he seemed to enjoy.

"What do you want with us?" I asked.

"Wha' wull I want wi' ye? Ye flatter me, sir! 'Tis nae ordinarr' perrson the like o' Sawney deals wi' your Lairrdship." He smirked. "This wull be Gairloch's business. Hee-hee! Be sure ye tak' them alive, Sawney, says he, the lassie and her Englishmon. Aye, this wull be Gairloch's business. Ye wull ken ma meanin', Miss MacRoss!"

CHAPTER XXV

I MEET SEVERAL OLD ACQUAINTANCES

"THIS is a pleasure long deferred," sneered Gairloch as he bowed low before Sheila.

She shrank away from him.

"But you do not fear me?" He came closer to her. "'Odsfish, now, 'twill never do. You shall see much of me in future, Mistress MacRoss. We must make amends for the past."

And his leer was only too plain to be understood. I strained at the lashings which bound my arms.

"You cur!" I snarled.

"Gadslife, the Englishman still talks!"

He walked up and dealt me a buffet with his fist in the mouth.

"That is for the blow you gave me in Glasgow," he said quietly, whilst I spat blood. "You shall have many more tortures, before you beg the dirk."

"Oh, you will not dare!" cried Sheila. "The English may be cruel, but they will not give such beasts as you free play."

An evil light flickered across his face, and his blank eyes swept the two of us, the pupils dwindling to pin-pricks of yellow flame.

"The English will know nothing about you—until I send in Chisholm's head." He laughed horridly. "And by that time, my dear, I don't think you will be appealing to Cumberland."

Still laughing, he left us. I was too sick at heart to speak. For myself, I did not care. Death, in some form or other, was all I had to fear. But Sheila! The memory of those baleful, animal eyes and that wicked leer drove me frantic.

Again I strained at the ropes which bound my arms, praying a knot might crack.

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"Don't!" exclaimed Sheila from her side of the bothy that housed us. "You will be hurting yourself. There is no use in wasting your strength."

I sank back exhausted.

"If only David were here!" I said miserably.

The tears poured from her eyes.

"First Ian Dhu, and then David—and all the rest! It is a bitter price the clan has paid. But that will not be the way to look at our lot. We must keep up our hopes——"

"Of what?" I barked savagely.

"Of what God will send if it is best," she answered as one talks to a child. "We are a long way from being at the grave's foot."

I dropped my head in shame. Hope was gone out of me, but at the least I should be able to support adversity as well as a maid.

We lay in the bothy all the rest of that day and the following night. In the morning Sawney haled us forth, and we started in the direction of Stroan, surrounded by Gairloch's clansmen. It seemed as though Gairloch dreaded pursuit of some kind. He rode at the head of the party, and he and Sawney were always urging on their men to a faster pace.

Toward noon a cloud of dust gathered in the road behind us, and took shape as a column of red-coated dragoons. They clattered up with a jingling of equipment, and Gairloch's people were forced to the roadside. 'Twas evident their appearance aroused no pleasure amongst our captors.

Utterly wearied and disheartened and choked with dust, I paid no heed to the Englishmen until their commander called out to Gairloch. Then I was shocked into instant attention.

The dragoon officer was mine old friend Sawtelle, whom I had rescued from Gairloch's clutches at Derby. I raised my eyes to his, but he did not recognize me under the coat of dust and in my Highland rags, although 'twas plain he knew Gairloch—and just as plain no love was lost betwixt them.

"What means this, my lord?" he demanded angrily. "I am ordered to assist you in beating the country back there, and I arrive to find you flown without a word of explanation?"

"Why, the explanation is simple, Captain," replied Gairloch civilly. "We were successful by ourselves and I am marching away the prisoners."

"Aye, sir, but why this mystery about it?"

"There is no mystery."

Sawtelle eyed him unpleasantly.

"You are not marching toward Fort William with them," he asserted. "Where are you taking them?"

Gairloch said something in a low tone, and Sawtelle shook his head.

"I can not agree with you at all, my lord," he said. "'Tis no less your duty than mine to see that these prisoners are brought before his Royal Highness at Fort William. The chase after the Pretender is growing warm. We must overlook no possible sources of information."

"Any information they may have will be forwarded to the duke," returned Gairloch. "You may rest assured of that, Captain, and I am certain his Royal Highness will apprehend the situation. I beg you will report to him that I am holding them at Stroan for his orders."

"Impossible," snapped Sawtelle. "You have not even told me who they are."

Gairloch shrugged his shoulders.

"You are at liberty to question them, sir," he said tartly. "The smaller one is Miss MacRoss of Slioch, a rebel chieftainess of mine own clan. I have some particular matters to settle with her, and I desire for that reason to take her to Stroan."

"Miss MacRoss of Slioch?" cried Sawtelle. "Why, man, she was of those at the Pretender's last council of war! She is one of the principal chiefs we have sought. His Royal Highness would take it ill if she were not brought before him. And you, my man—" he leveled his finger at me—"what is your name?"

"I am Captain Chisholm, late aide-de-camp to Lord George Murray and before that attached to the suite of Prince Charles," I answered boldly.

Sawtelle leaned down toward me and his jaw dropped, but he held himself in control.

"Chisholm?" he repeated. "Chisholm? Sure, I have heard that name! Yes, my lord, this fellow will be no less valuable a prize than the lady."

"Lady!" mouthed Gairloch sarcastically, the veins in his temples twitching with passion. "'Sdeath, sir, would you call this little jade a lady? She has been running about the countryside with her gallant so their names are bywords amongst their own kind.

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Sawtelle's disgust was revealed in his open countenance.

"'Tis a point I do not care to debate, my lord," he replied. "The fact of my duty—and yours—is that these two prisoners must be carried straightway to Fort William. I make no doubt the duke will be pleased to pay you the fitting reward you have earned by your efforts in taking them."

Gairloch gave him a stare of baffled rage.

"Sir, you exceed your authority," he said. "Do as you like."

That was the end of it. Instead of bearing to the westward for Stroan, we turned south toward Fort William.

NOT once, during the two days that followed, did Sawtelle address a word to me. But a detachment of his dragoons took over the guarding of us, and at his order our bonds were loosened so that we had ordinary comfort on the march.

'Twas late in the afternoon of the second day when we came in sight of the frowning walls of Fort William, rising above the blue waters of the Linnhe Loch, with the great peak of Ben Nevis towering overhead. We had heard tales up north in the heather of other unfortunates who had been carried to Fort William. All such had gone from it either to the headsmen at London or Carlisle or to the slave-ships that bore their stinking cargoes across the Atlantic.

As the gates clanged behind us it seemed that our last hope of liberty had fled. To us, used to the springy turf of the hills, there was something forbidding even about the cobbled paving of the fortress square, in which we were detained whilst Sawtelle and Gairloch went to seek audience with Cumberland. The barred windows, the massive stone parapets, the tramping sentries, the dour cannon—all inspired a depression of heart we had not known before in the outer air.

Crooked Sawney, who lounged near by, gloated in our misery, as usual.

"Ye wull be fair caget, noo, ma birrdies," he chuckled. "It isna sae lanesome as Stroan, but I ken ye wull be gey glad to leave it—whilk ye never wull, save it be wi' us."

The dragoons, uncouth, cloddish louts, enjoyed this sport, and other soldiers of the garrison gathered around, making blunt comments upon Sheila's figure and masses of tangled hair. 'Twas a relief when the order came to conduct us to Cumberland's presence.

We were led through long corridors and up many flights of stairs, into a large room with high windows. At a desk sat a ruddy-faced, stout young man, with rather prominent eyes and a coarse mouth—the same that had been saved by my lost pistol-flint at Clifton Hall fight. Beside him stood Sawtelle and Gairloch.

"Ho, rebels," he said, "come hither."

He spoke with a slight German accent.

"So, this is the little MacRoss." He eyed Sheila with the cool aplomb of a horse-fancier. "Not bad, Gairloch. I congratulate your judgment. Lean, but I think she can be fattened, eh?"

He swung around on her with a bull-throated roar.

"Vell, girl, vhere did you leave the Pretender?"

Sheila met him eye to eye.

"If you mean his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, I have not seen him since the day of Culloden Moor," she answered.

Cumberland flushed. He was dictatorial in temperament and he had no sense of humor.

"I vill teach you to sbeak disrespectfully to me, you slut!" he shouted. "You know who I am? Your cursed country knows me. I am the Duke of Cumberland!"

"Known to all Europe as 'The Butcher'," returned Sheila.

Her hearers gasped. Cumberland choked with rage, and ripped out a foul name that made Sawtelle wince. Gairloch plainly enjoyed the scene.

"I think I vill do one of two things to you," announced the Duke after he had mastered his temper. "Vould you like to know, eh?"

Sheila eyed him contemptuously without answering.

"Oh, you von't talk any more?" Cumberland laughed almost good-naturedly. "Vell, I tell you vat I do vith you. I think I strip you naked to ride horse-back races for my soldiers vith the peasant vomens of the country or I give you to my friend, Gairloch here."

Despite her self-possession a wave of color flooded Sheila's neck and face. The Duke roared boisterously.

"Ho, ho, ve have touched the delicate

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maiden there! Vell, maybe I change my plan, eh? Maybe I strip you naked to ride races with the peasant vomens, and after that I give you to Gairloch instead of to the soldiers, eh?"

I could stand no more.

"It was my understanding that your Royal Highness was a soldier," I said, stepping forward. "But no soldier would manner himself so dastardly toward a woman. Your Royal Highness must be a hangman by profession."

Cumberland listened to my speech in silent amazement, but I had no sooner finished than he burst into one of his bull roars.

"And vat sort of Scottish svine are you?" he demanded. "My Gott, is it so a Prince of the Blood is addressed in his own fortress?"

"I am Captain Chisholm, late aide-de-camp to Lord George Murray—and I am no Scotsman."

"So-ho!" Cumberland's pig-eyes narrowed as he squinted over me. "This is the trollop's apple-squire."

"Quite right, sir," put in Gairloch, "and one of the few English officers with the Pretender. He joined at Derby and fought through to Culloden. He was very close to the Pretender."

"That is correct," I assented. "I am no turncoat."

"Be silent!" bellowed the duke. "Speak only when you are spoken to or I vill have your tongue burned out."

He conferred in whispers for a moment with Gairloch.

"Vere did you last see the Pretender?" he asked next.

"I saw him last when Miss MacRoss saw him."

"Vhere vas that?"

"At Felie, during the retreat from Culloden Moor."

"But you have heard of him since?"

"No."

"If you lie to me," remarked the duke very softly, "you vill have many pains before you die."

"I know nothing, so how can I lie?"

At this point Sawtelle stepped forward and whispered in Cumberland's ear. I tried hard to hear, but 'twas impossible. Presently, the duke nodded and stood up.

"Goot," he approved. "Let them think over it, eh? Put them in the lower dungeon."

He stepped around the desk and walked to Sheila's side.

"So-ho," he chuckled, pinching her arm. "A dainty little hussy. But you are too late, Gairloch. This odder fellow vas before you. You still vant her?"

A horrible smile creased Gairloch's face, and his inscrutable eyes focused on Sheila's heaving breast.

"Yes, your Royal Highness," he said.

"Vell, there is no accounting for men's tastes," observed the Duke equitably. "For me, now, she vould be too thin. I do not like 'em so. But you can have her—after ve are through vith her."

"And the man?" pressed Gairloch.

"Himmel!" Cumberland swore humorously. "You do not ask for much!"

"I will ask for no more, sir."

"Vell, ve vill see. Maybe you can have him, too—ven I am through vith him. And I vager you a hundred pounds, my lord, he knows more of me before I am through vith him. Captain Sawtelle, you may take them avay. The deepest dungeon, remember."

SAWTELLE led us into the hall, where our guards awaited us, and then down flight after flight of damp stone steps into the bowels of the earth below the bastions. Here, at the bottommost level, a turnkey presented himself and unlocked a rusty gate. From the opposite side there came a feeble rush of ghostly humanity, which was checked by the first brutal order and the guns of the dragoons gleaming in the lantern-light.

"In wi' ye," growled the turnkey, giving us each a push, and we stumbled over the threshold, tripped on sprawling limbs and fell headlong, as the gate jarred shut.

"I dinna ken wha' ye may be, but wull ye just be off ma legs?" said a voice under me.

I did so, and stepped on some one else.

"Are there many here?" I asked in a voice that was echoed with funereal majesty by the surrounding walls.

A hollow laugh was my answer.

"Mony!" cackled a shrill voice. "Mony! Mon, we wull be that thick we canna stirr wi'oot the ain tellin' the ither."

"Well, there are two more of us. Can you make room for us somewhere?"

"Aye," responded a gentle old voice. "Come your ways, young mon. There be room i' the far corrner."

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I took Sheila by the hand, and cautiously we picked a path between the close-packed bodies of our fellow prisoners. The stench was almost suffocating. Old and young, sick and feeble, men and women, rich and poor, all were crowded into that dank hole —and there was scarce a dungeon in Scotland, as bad or worse, was not equally full.

The gentle old voice belonged to a Lowland minister, who had fallen under suspicion and been imprisoned in this Highland fortress that he might be inaccessible to his friends. He instructed us in the dungeon's daily life, and recounted the toll of our companions.

"We hae none verra sick just noo," he remarked. "But whiles its bad, ma friends. I canna think why it is we dinna hae the sma'pox."

None asked us our own troubles in that earthly hell. Each prisoner knew that his neighbors were there for the same offense as himself, and prolonged suffering had made most of them callous.

The total darkness hid the sequence of day and night, but after we had talked a while both Sheila and I grew weary and we withdrew to the scanty space we had secured in the corner farthest from the gate.

I sat down with my back to the wall, and Sheila crept up beside me. I could feel her body shaking, and instinctively my arms went around her.

"What is it?" I whispered. "There, lassie! You are not afraid?"

"No," she whispered back, and buried her head in my shoulder. "But—but—oh, Frank, do you think we will never get free?"

"It was yourself said we were not yet at the grave's foot," I reminded her.

"But we were not then in the dungeons of Fort William. Oh, Frank, I——"

She quivered with sobs, and I held her closer. I know not what I said, for my tongue ran away with me; but gradually I soothed her quiet and she lay still.

"Will you sleep?" I asked.

"Your arms will be very comfortable," she murmured.

The barriers I had reared against myself collapsed. The flame I had striven to quench in my heart burned up triumphant and clear.

"Sheila," I said, and now 'twas I trembled from head to foot.

"Yes?" Her voice responded sleepily. "Why do you——"

"There—there is—a—a matter—I—I have to speak of. I—I meant to stay silent until you were safe, but——"

"Yes?" Her voice was wide-awake and encouraging.

"Sheila, I love you, and I must tell you, lest the chance never comes again, for——"

Two arms went around my neck and two lips clung to mine.

"Oh, dear lad," she whispered. "Dear lad! It will have been that chance I wept for a minute since. My ain dear lad!"

"Do—do you really love me?" I questioned diffidently. Certes, it seemed beyond belief.

She pulled my ear down to her mouth.

"Yes, big zany—with all my heart. And Frank, if I die or—" a sudden seriousness overcame her—"must kill myself with the morrow's morn, I am happy—I shall be happy. I ask no more. My ain dear lad!"

CHAPTER XXVI

SAWTELLE'S DEBT

THERE was a jangle of keys at the gate, and the teeming inmates of our dungeon stirred to life.

"Wha' can it be?" said the Lowland minister who lay next to us. "They wull hae brocht bread and water the hour passed."

"Wull it be some body is to gang free?" ventured a voice in the darkness.

"Nae fear. They winna——"

"Lie down, rebels," came the hoarse voice of the turnkey. "All but ane MacRoss and ane Chisholm, taken and keppit for high treason and sedition against his Gracious Majesty. Come your ways oot, MacRoss and Chisholm. We hae the rack waitin' for ye."

Our friend fumbled hold of a hand of each of us.

"God be wi' ye' bairnies," he said earnestly. "Gie your hearrts to Him. I wull be on ma knees prayin' for ye."

"Mak' haste, ye —— rebel swobs," commanded the turnkey irately. "If I hae to come after ye, ye wull gang sore up the stairs."

"We are coming," I called. "'Tis not easy to walk where so many lie."

"Trample the guts o' them oot, laddie. They wad gie ye thanks," he retorted. "Noo then."

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We stood in the corridor, blinking in the light of the lantern he carried and gulping down mouthfuls of the less vitrified air which circulated through some outlet of these nether regions. An English foot soldier, musket on shoulder, waited beside the turnkey.

"Aye, these wull be wha' ye seek," the turnkey told him, after carefully inspecting us. "They cam' in only yesternicht, and I hae their faces in ma mind. Follow the sojer, rebels."

We had no precise idea of the time, but as we came to the upper levels the mellow light told us it must be late afternoon. We had been no more than twenty-four hours underground. It had seemed a week.

Our soldierkeeper marched us to a door in a far corner of the fortress pile. He knocked, and a voice cried:

"Come in."

He grounded his musket, and stuck his head inside the door:

"Here be pris'ners, zurr," he announced.

"Send 'em in. You may take station outside until I call you."

My heart leaped at the brisk tones. 'Twas Sawtelle's voice.

He was standing by a desk under a loophole window, but he strode forward as we entered.

"Now, then, my rebel pair," he shouted, "you have had a taste of the joys of Fort William. Are you prepared to be sensible and tell what we ask? There are other ways of making you speak, if this has not been sufficient."

"You have a short memory, Sawtelle," I answered coldly.

He grinned, and replied in little more than a whisper:

"Good God, Chisholm, you could have sold me up for a Dutchman when I recognized you the other day. Stap me, lad, but you could! How got you in such a plight? But enough! We have no time for reminiscences. I bellowed at you just now, in his Royal Highness's style, to impress upon the sentry the stern way in which I was treating you. Is this lady——"

He paused delicately.

"She has promised to marry me," I said.

Sawtelle bowed low.

"I fain would dance at the wedding, Mistress, but I fear it may not be. You will forgive me the harshness of my conduct toward you? 'Twas vitally important no suspicion should arise in our good friend Gairloch's mind implicating me with you two. I had to wait my chance."

Sheila regarded him in bewilderment. Poor child, I had not dared to raise her hope by explaining the slight hold I had on Sawtelle's gratitude, for when he cut me at our first meeting, with no formal word of regret at my position, I was ready to believe the worst of human nature.

He turned to me again.

"Indeed, I have not forgotten your kindness, Chisholm," he declared. "I owe you my life twice over—there was Falkirk, as well as Derby. This is my opportunity to square the debt. It shall not be my fault if I do not repay you, for I swear I would do it to despite that hangman Gairloch, if for no other reason."

"Man!" I fairly sobbed. "Repay, it do you say? If you will but see that Miss MacRoss escapes this hell you will have repaid me with interest at one hundred per centum!"

"Tush," he said kindly. "You are overwrought. And I do not think Miss MacRoss could escape without your assistance—even if she would."

Sheila gave him a shy look of appreciation.

"Here is my plan," he went on. "Criticize it if you can."

He drew from a pocket of his uniform coat a bit of paper and handed it to me.

"In the first place, there is a pass for one soldier to take a Highland lad to Inveraray—'twas meant for another and I obtained it by trickery. Now, you have just given me to understand that you are prepared to impart important information as to the lurking-place of the Pretender—I beg pardon, Miss MacRoss—Prince Charles Stuart. But you insist upon dealing direct with the Duke of Cumberland. You are trying to drive a bargain for your own skins.

"Very good! I shall leave you here, calling in the sentry in the hall without to mount guard over the two of you."

He opened a drawer in the desk.

"Here is a pistol. The key of the door is in the lock on this side. I shall be gone some time, because I shall recommend to the Duke that you be allowed to stew in your own anxiety a half-hour or so—you will be so much the more ready to talk."

He smiled.

"Is that all clear to you?"

Here was a fighting chance. Slim, perhaps. But what more could we ask?

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I wrung Sawtelle's hand.

"I am ashamed that I should ever have doubted you," I stammered. "'Tis vastly more than ever I did for you. Sure, they will suspect you, will they not?"

"What if they do?" He waved it aside. "No, I shall simply claim that when you were searched you must have concealed a pistol about you, or there was collusion elsewhere within the fortress. The pass was not issued for me, nor is it known I have possessed it. At the worst, I shall be placed under arrest for a time, and betwixt us three, 'tis a fate I should infinitely prefer to this butchery. 'Tis no soldier's work. I am disposed to throw up my commission as soon as may be."

He offered me the pistol, and I passed it over to Sheila. She hid it in the folds of her plaid.

"Is there aught else I can do?" asked Sawtelle, standing by the door. "There is no time to waste, for you will want daylight to get started on your way."

"All I will be saying," answered Sheila sweetly, "is that you are as knightly a gentleman as I have in my own clan, and I take pleasure in the thought I owe you a favor, sir."

Sawtelle swept the floor with his hat.

"I am honored, madam. And you, Chisholm?"

"Only this, old friend. I have an uncle, Lord Chisholm of Stradbrooke in Suffolk. He has not heard from me since I rode from home to join Prince Charles. 'Twas on my road I met you. If you can, will you give him privy word of my safety—if we do win safe? If not, tell him—tell him I have naught to be sorry for."

"I will do so gladly. Goodby."

We gripped hands for the last time. He opened the door.

"Sentry," he called. "I must see his Royal Highness. Do you come in and mount guard over these prisoners until I return."

The door slammed shut, and the sentry took up his position to the left of it, leaning upon his musket. Fortunately, his bayonet was not fixed. We waited a decent time for Sawtelle to get out of range. Then I dropped one eyelid in Sheila's direction.

"Sentry," she said.

"Aye?" he replied, turning his eyes upon her.

"Drop your gun!"

And she flashed the pistol in his face. Simultaneously, I sprang at him from the side. He stood a moment in bewilderment, half-raised his piece, thought better of it, and let it fall as I reached him. I snatched it up in time to prevent its banging on the floor.

"Ye wunna zhoot?" he wheezed in his North-country dialect.

"I will shoot you dead, if you make a noise," returned Sheila.

"And what is more I will drive your own bayonet into you," I added, as I pulled the weapon from its sheath.

"Lawks, I wunna do't. I wunna," he pleaded.

"Off with your uniform," I ordered peremptorily.

He hesitated, and I applied the bayonet to his arm. In a trice he had slipped out of boots, leggings, breeches, coat, cross-belts and helmet. Sheila appeared with a piece of rope that had been handy in a cupboard. We made the man lie down, and then, whilst Sheila held the pistol to his head, I strapped him from his ankles to his shoulders and capped the job with a gag of wadding from his cartridge-box.

This done, we rolled him into the cupboard, and I quickly doffed my rags and put on his uniform. I was about to throw my Highland garb after the soldier, when Sheila stayed me.

"We will be wanting that yet," she objected, and she made it into a rough bundle such as Highlanders often carry with them when traveling.

"Are we ready?" I asked, my heart thumping desperately in my breast.

She handed me the pass which Sawtelle had provided, and I stuck it under my cross-belts, as I had seen soldiers do.

"And there will be one thing more," she said.

I looked at her in bewilderment. She laughed and came and stood in front of me on her tiptoes.

"Kiss me, dear lad," she whispered.

VERY cautiously, I opened the door. The corridor was deserted. I removed the key from the inside, and we locked the door. Then I put the key in my pocket, and we tramped off, Sheila in front of me. At the end of the corridor we came to a flight of stairs, which debouched upon the ramparts, and from

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these a second steep stair led to the courtyard.

Nobody paid any attention to us in that place, which was one vast prison. I had a severe fright, when I glimpsed a Highlander standing in the shadows of an archway, for I thought he might be one of Gairloch's men. But if he was, he did not recognize Sheila, and at my instruction she disguised herself as much as she could, affecting a huddled, shambling gait, not at all like her customary proud carriage, and exactly what might be expected from a half-grown Scots bumpkin.

At the great gate, the guard halted us, and I produced my pass. He took it in to an officer, who sent it back without comment. Almost before we realized it, we were across the moat and in the open air, the setting sun shining down upon us as gloriously as it had that last fatal evening on Ben Fionn. I had all I could do to keep from seizing Sheila's hand and dancing around with her, but by an effort I preserved my stiff military stride, and so we passed several groups of soldiers returning from foraging and patrol expeditions.

After we had put the houses of the village between us and the fortress we hurried at a rate which would have looked suspicious to the sentries on the walls. But we had gone no more than a mile ere there came the sullen boom of a gun that set the echoes rolling from the flanks of Ben Nevis across the Linnhe Loch.

"That will be a warning we have escaped!" exclaimed Sheila.

Ten minutes later we met a squad of soldiers under a sergeant.

"What does the gun mean?" asked the sergeant.

"A prisoner has escaped, sir. One of the chiefs, I heard."

"Umph. Well, look to it that boy doesn't slip you. You ought to have him on a rope. Here, I have just what you need."

The sergeant turned his pockets inside out, and produced a length of cord, which he graciously sold me for a penny—the same having come to me with my uniform. This cord I fastened to Sheila's arm, and we proceeded, regretting the loss of a precious five minutes.

We saw no more soldiers and took advantage of the deepening twilight to leave the road for Inveraray, aiming now for the craggy recesses of Ben Nevis.

"We must not be losing sight of it that our real danger is from Gairloch," Sheila pointed out. "The soldiers will never get far at night. But Sawney and his caterans will follow our scent as they would a stag's. We will be measuring ourselves against them."

"Where are we to go, then? Shall we beat back toward the North?"

She considered.

"No, I am doubting we could make it, Frank. The Highland line is too fast guarded for us to pass it without guides from the Camerons or some clan that know it well."

"The wildest country in these parts would be that about Rannoch Moor," I suggested.

"That will be a good plan," she approved. "If we can get there, we maybe can lose Gairloch for long enough to find friends."

In the starlight we ascended the huge ribs of Ben Nevis, crossed his eastern side, and set our course across the swelling waves of the wide Forest of Mamore, with the summit of Stob Ban a guiding-point on our right. Southeast of this lay the wilderness surrounding Rannoch Moor, with its twin lakes and its rievers' hut, a fit setting for tragedy.

CHAPTER XXVII

IAN DHU'S VISION

ON THE farther side of Mamore we struck the head of Loch Eilt-mor, and tramped southeast, past a clutter of mountains that rimmed Glen Coe, toward the lonely pile of Meall Bhalach. Lochaber was behind us. But 'twas desperate work clambering those harsh rock-paths, and on the near face of Meall Bhalach Sheila gave in—although, to say truth, I was on the verge of exhaustion, myself. We had then been traveling eight hours without rest, no slight feat in our ill-fed condition.

I found a nook in the rocks, sheltered by a patch of bracken, and here we lay down, after I had stripped off the unwieldy uniform, which had been hampering my movements, and put on again the ragged Highland dress Sheila's thoughtfulness had made available.

The earliest hint of the dawnlight brought us to our feet, and as we set out Sheila sniffed at the air, as I had seen David and

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other clansmen do during our days in the heather.

"We will be followed," she said.

"You can never smell them," I scouted.

"No, but I can feel them. We will be followed—and they are not far in the rear."

" 'Twas that sergeant who insisted upon selling me the cord. He must have put them on our trail. A soldier and a young Highlander—the scent was broad enough."

"Well," returned Sheila cheerfully, "and if it was? You have your gun and bayonet and I have my pistol. I am thinking we will give a good account of ourselves."

This reminded me that I had never examined the equipment I had taken from the soldier, and I was dismayed to discover that his cartridge-box contained but six charges, which, with the charge in the musket, made a total of seven.

"Do not be letting that worry you," Sheila consoled me. "It will be enough for our purposes, and when they are gone you have your bayonet."

"But you? You have the one charge in your pistol."

"And what of it?" says she stoutly. "When I have fired it, there will be the pistol to throw in a man's face, and afterward——"

She hesitated, and cast her eye over the ground we were traversing.

"—why, afterward, I shall have this fine stick." She picked up a straight, two-inch limb of young wood. "It will not be every gillie can best me with the claymore, and I will make shift with this until you come to aid me."

"God send we do not find ourselves in that pinch!" I prayed fervently.

We were on the topmost shoulder of Meall Bhalach when we sighted our pursuers, riding up the glen that separated the mountain from the neighboring mass of the Black Corries. There were four, all mounted upon mountain ponies. Whether they saw us we could not be sure, but the serious fact in the situation was that evidently they had divined our destination.

"It is not too late to turn back," I suggested.

"It is," denied Sheila. "Do but think, Frank. The soldiers will be out everywhere for us. They will have cordons stretched that a bird could scarce fly over. Our one hope is to press on."

"Aye, but Sawney must be with that party. He knows every trail in this country. What chance do we stand?"

"Dear lad," smiled Sheila. She sprang to my side. "You will not be feared for yourself, will you?"

"Nay."

"Then it will be me you are worrying for?"

"Mayhap," I admitted.

"Well, you will be wrong. There is a voice in my heart that cries out to go on—that all will be right." She laughed mischievously. "You would not be thinking so much of trouble if you had a full meal."

I groaned.

"A full meal! Certes, I would give Chisholm Castle, and I had it here, for a mess of the crowdy you brewed on Ben Fionn."

From the slopes of Meall Bhalach the expanse of Rannoch Moor stretched away before us, with the two lakes, Loch Ba and Loch Na Hachlaise, shining like big eyes in the sun.

IT MUST have been an hour later we caught the next glimpse of our hunters, as they rounded the base of Meall Bhalach. They saw us at the same time, and quickened their pace—a signal for us to change our walk for a slinging trot. But I knew that half-starved folk like ourselves could never last against hardy mountain ponies on the levels of the moor. I halted.

"Do you go on," I bade Sheila. "I must try to pick off one of them."

Sheila, who had been trudging along without a word, for all the aches that racked her slender body, flushed and stood still.

"You will not be ordering me so," she cried rebelliously. "If you stay, I stay."

"You will hinder me," I pleaded. "I must be free to shoot and run."

She hesitated.

"You will not stay long?"

I promised and she left me. Then I crouched behind a swell in the moor, resting the barrel of my musket on a boulder that cropped out of the heather. The four horsemen were in view, but I waited until I had identified the two foremost as Gairloch and Crooked Sawney. I aimed carefully at Gairloch, but the bullet knocked over one of the pair of gillies that followed him. 'Twas worth while, however, for they paused to examine the man and fired

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their muskets and pistols at me, so that we gained some hundreds of yards.

A mile farther on I tried it again, but this time my anxiety played me false, and I wasted two shots in vain. Gairloch rode after me, too, so fast that I did not have time to reload, and when I caught up with Sheila, panting and out of breath, I must needs pass the musket to her that she might do it for me. By this foolishness I lost the little lead we had won, and they even gained on us.

At the Crappie Burn we tarried to quench our thirst, and I threw away another bullet to give Sheila a fresh start. The enemy were so close I marveled they did not shoot at us. But barring the fusillade when I shot the gillie, they had not used their firearms. Doubtless 'twas Gairloch's desire to take us alive that granted us this indulgence.

He had every reason to expect success. The superior speed of their ponies permitted them to crowd us toward the north, with the result that presently we were confronted by the sedgy shores of Loch Ba, whilst they cut us off from the neck of land betwixt the lakes, the only avenue of escape to the southern side of the moor. Our plight was desperate. We were practically hemmed in, with the waters of the lake in front and our enemies behind us.

'Twas Sheila settled our problem.

"I can not go on," she announced suddenly. "We must just be stopping here and doing what we may."

"I am willing," I said. "But let us go into the reeds by the lake's shore. They will give us some cover."

This move caught Gairloch unawares. He had been set on heading us from the passage betwixt the lakes, and he did not see what we had done until the remaining gillie called his attention to our disappearance. But that sleuth-hound Sawney fathomed our trick at once, and the three of them rode cautiously toward the lake shore, strung out in a half-circle.

The gillie was nearest, and I killed him in two shots—a miss and a hit. My last charge I had reserved for Gairloch, but sober judgment told me to shoot at Sawney, who was next in line. To my disgust, the best I could do was to hit the cateran's pony, and he scrambled to his feet, none the worse for a tumble.

Sheila put her finger to my lips when I would have cursed the luck that saved him.

"They will be but two to our two now," she rebuked. "You will have shot nobly, dear lad."

Gairloch was crashing through the reeds, pistol and claymore drawn, his reins hanging loose. Sawney ran beside him, squattering over the ground with amazing agility for a man so deformed.

"You must lie hid in the reeds," I instructed Sheila hastily. "Do not use your pistol unless you must."

"I will be doing nothing like that," she retorted with flashing eyes. "You may meet Gairloch, but remember that Sawney is he that murdered my father and David, the last of my kinsmen."

I seized her arm.

"But, Sheila——"

She twisted away from me, and sprang forward, waving her stick.

"MacRoss!" she shouted. "Claymore! MacRoss!"

The shaggy mountain pony took fright and swerved, almost unseating Gairloch, who was carried off, swearing viciously.

I had a fleeting glimpse of Sawney on his hands and knees in the reeds, as I ran after Gairloch, and I cried a warning to her. But she was watching him, and as he leaped at her she struck out deftly with her stick and he retreated.

"Bravely done, sweetheart!" I hailed her.

"Do not be minding me, Frank," she replied. "Take heed to Gairloch."

There was cause for her words, for Gairloch charged me whilst my back was turned, and I narrowly missed being run down. He fired his pistol, as he wheeled in the shallow water, but the bullet went wide.

Then a yell of triumph came from Sawney, and reckless of what Gairloch might be doing, I ran toward where he was strugling hand-to-hand with Sheila. He had knocked the stick from her grasp and closed in on her; but before I reached them she stooped quickly and bit him on the hand.

He screamed with pain, and she flung a fold of her plaid against his face. Blinded and confused, he let go of one of her arms, and in a trice she had out her pistol and he reeled back with a bullet through his shoulder.

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SO MUCH I saw. There was a spatter of hoofs in the crackling reeds, and instinctively I dropped to one side. The tip of a claymore sheared my bonnet, and Gairloch was by. I was scarce on my feet when he rode at me again, but this time, as I side-stepped, I drove my bayonet into his horse's flank, and the beast went mad.

Gairloch fought to regain control of him, realized 'twas impossible and vaulted from the saddle. In his blind rage his one thought was to get at me.

"Hell blast you, Chisholm!" he snarled as he ran up. "I am not so easy to escape as you thought. You will be rotting in the lake mud an hour hence."

He launched a lightning claymore stroke, which I parried with the barrel of my musket. Yet its point streaked my cheek, and the blood burst forth, almost blinding me. The fiend knew it, and thrust swiftly, hoping to catch me off guard. But somehow I fended with my clumsy weapon, and stepped beyond his reach.

His evil face contorted into a ferocious grimace. I noted, too, the weird dwindling of the pupils of his eyes that always accompanied his fits of passion.

"You are afraid, eh?" he mocked. "You may be. 'Tis no nice fate awaits you. It had been better for you had you stayed in Fort William—better for her, too."

As he talked he struck again and again—right, left, right, left—as a smith hammers the anvil. The musket was heavy, and my arms tired under the constant shifting strain.

A mist gathered in my eyes, but through its swirling clouds I saw clearly Gairloch's tense figure, as it leaped and bounded, advanced and retreated. And there flashed into my mind a picture of Derby Market-place, a serried column of clansmen and Ian Dhu speaking slow.

"Ye wull fecht the Master some day," he said. "I hae seen. 'Twas nae verra clear, but all in a wabbly mist."

In a mist! Yes, that was what he had said. And here I was, fighting Gairloch in a mist. I found myself wishing Ian Dhu had predicted how the fight would end. Perhaps—I chuckled grimly at the thought—I was fighting to no purpose after all.

I cast a glance behind me. We were within a yard of the water's edge.

Gairloch sneered.

"Taking a look at your bed? You will sleep long. I shall think of you as I enjoy myself with your little mistress."

The word was what I needed. I sprang at him, steel-muscled once more, despite my hunger and weariness, and now 'twas he gave ground, parrying the bayonet thrusts I lunged at him. As I fought, I seemed to regain my wind. The mist cleared away, and I saw him hovering opposite, claymore poised. The lake margin was at his back, and I charged without warning, driving my musket at him as though it had been a battering-ram. He stepped backward, and plunged to his thighs in the water.

I followed him remorselessly. The water closed around my own knees. He staggered before a thrust, recovered and struck at me. I dodged as the point ripped my plaid.

"Ha," he laughed drunkenly. "Close, Chisholm, close! The wench is mine!"

Confidence must have made him careless. He thrust openly for my breast, and I caught his point on the locking-ring of my bayonet. A twist, and the steel shivered with a sharp cling, leaving him a scant six inches of blade on the hilt.

I raised my bayonet to finish him, but I could not do it. The man was defenseless. He stood gazing blankly at me, apparently confused by disaster, and only his hands moved under the water.

From behind me Sheila called:

"Strike, Frank, strike!"

Then, with a note of terror:

"His dirk! 'Ware his dirk!"

There was a flurry of muddy water, and Gairloch was on me, the skeen dhu he had jerked from his stocking threatening my throat. In the confusion I dropped the musket that was my only weapon, and grappled his wrist. But my last strength was sped. I could feel my arms slackening, saw that he knew I felt them give. His eyes glared down into mine, baleful and expressionless, their pupils pin-pricks of yellow flame.

"You fool!" he hissed.

A roaring and buzzing grew in my ears, as I strove to keep my grip. Sheila's voice rang clear in the outer void:

"Hold, Frank, hold!"

Gairloch's face receded from me. It seemed to sink lower and lower. The light faded from the evil eyes, the pupils dwindled to nothingness. As I stared, swaying

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on my feet, the oily, brown waters of the lake sucked greedily at it, and it disappeared.

I felt that I was falling—falling—and the oily, brown waters eagerly awaited me.

"Tak' hold o' his other arrm," said a strange voice. "Hoot, leddy, dinna greet. He wullna die."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE NAMELESS LASS

"SUP this, dear lad," commanded Sheila, and a fiery gulp of whisky burned my gullet.

I opened my eyes. I was lying in a patch of trampled reeds, and the sun was beating down upon my soaked body with grateful warmth.

"Hecht, but it wull tak' a by-ordinarr' dunt to kill an Englishmon," remarked an oddly familiar voice.

I struggled to a sitting posture, Sheila's arms supporting me. 'Twas Crooked Sawney had spoken. He lay opposite me, with his legs bound and an arm hanging loose, very much at his ease.

"Aweell, noo," he continued fawningly, "it wull be gey glad I am to see ye nae worrse, Captain Chisholm. Live and let live, wull be ma motto. Whiles the fechtin' is ower Sawney is ony mon's friend."

"Dinna fash yoursel', Sawney," snapped another voice behind me. "If himsel' didna ken the pawkie nib o' ye, I wad just gie him a worrd or twa wad set him richt."

I strained around to see who had spoken. Another surprise!

"Why—why—you!" I gasped. "'Tis—you are the inn-keeper's lass from Killin!"

"That same," she assented drily.

She stood with her hands on her hips and a belligerent eye on Sawney.

"We will be owing much to her, too, Frank," spoke up Sheila at my back. "It was she saved you from Gairloch out yon."

And she gestured toward the smiling waters of the lake that rippled lazily in the bright sunshine.

Gairloch's name restored me to full consciousness.

"Is he——"

She nodded.

"He will be bothering us no more. His wicked soul is gone. It was this brave lass stabbed him as he was putting his dirk to your throat, for I dared not be leaving Sawney here."

I stretched out my hand to the inn-keeper's lass.

"I never knew your name," I said, "but this is the second time you have saved my life."

She fidgeted her hands in the soiled skirt she wore and flushed a dull red.

"It wasna aught to boggle aboot. And I hae nae name."

"No name at all?" asked Sheila kindly.

"Nae."

And she looked down shamefacedly at her bare toes.

"But what is your father's name?" I pressed.

She gave me a quick look from under level brows.

"He isna ma feyther. He just calls himsel' so."

Crooked Sawney evidently felt that he had been long enough out of this conversation.

"If ye mean the mon wha' keeps the inn at Killin," he volunteered, "he wull be called Campbell—Jamey Campbell."

David had been right, then, I reflected.

"He isna ma feyther," the girl repeated stubbornly.

"Nae doot," agreed Sawney, as if anxious to please her. "I hae heard tell——"

She turned on him like a hot flame.

"Dinna trouble yoursel' wi' wha' ye hae hearrd," she cried. "Keep a quiet tongue in your head or belike I wull put ye where Gairloch is the noo."

"Oh, aye," he conciliated quickly. "Dinna fash yoursel', lass."

I looked from one to the other of them in some bewilderment.

"But how do you come here?" I asked the girl.

"We wull be at the rievers' hut—him that's called ma feyther and me."

"Can you give shelter to Miss MacRoss and me for a few hours?"

"Aye," she said. And with a swift look added—"But ye wad best be gangin' awa' frae this as quickly as ye may."

"Why? Is there danger?" exclaimed Sheila.

"Nae just danger, but—" She hesitated. "Ma feyther is awa' to Killin and he wull be back the nicht."

"Oh!" I whistled low. "And Sawney?"

She came close to us and whispered her answer.

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"Sawney wull be the master o' him."

"Sawney is by way of a problem to us," I said. "'Tis a vast pity your bullet did not end him, too, Sheila."

She looked uncomfortable.

"Do not be plaguing me, dear lad," she begged. "When it came time to shoot, I—I—could not."

This was a change in Sheila, mark you. The Sheila I knew of old would have killed an enemy as carelessly as she would have shot a deer. She had been nine parts warrior and one part maid. Now, the proportions were reversed.

"I think food will be grateful to the pair of us, sweetheart," I said. "Shall we walk to the rievers' hut?"

When we neared the hut, the nameless lass—I know not what else to call her—went ahead with Sawney to prepare food, and Sheila and I followed slowly.

"Are you unhurt, dearest?" I questioned so soon as we were alone.

"I will not have a scratch," she answered smiling.

"How did you contrive to win from that—" a murderous instinct arose in me as my eyes dwelt on Sawney's crooked figure—"that hell-begotten scoundrel?"

She raised her eyes to mine.

"Dear lad, I was so worn I was beginning not to care if he took me. Then I saw your face as you ran toward us, and the thought came in my mind, if Sawney bound me, there would be the two of them against you, alone. And a madness came on me, and the next that I knew I had out my pistol and was about to press it against his heart. But something within me weakened, and I fired against his shoulder. Indeed, it will be a sore wound," she added propitiatingly.

I laughed with the sheer abandon of reaction.

"We have another chance for life, Sheila. Gad, think of it! Gairloch gone, and a free path before us!"

"You must not be too sure," she objected. "We will be a long way from safe. This is a bad spot. It has evil memories."

"Yes, I shall be glad to leave it."

THE rievers' hut was in front of us, low-roofed and squatted against the swell in the moor that contained the secret plunger room, where Sheila had been concealed.

"Do you mind the last time we were here?" I asked.

"Aye."

Both of us gave thought in that moment to brave David, who had died, in a measure, that we might live. We fell silent. But at the door, after Sawney had gone in, I ventured a question that had popped into my mind when the hut first came in sight.

"Sheila," I said.

"Yes?"

"What was the name Sawney told you at St. Ninians, the day he lured you away with him?"

She gave me a demure glance. Then averted her eyes.

"What name was that?"

"You know," I insisted. "He told you one lay wounded, who asked for you."

"Can you not guess?"

"How?"

"You must be very stupid," she returned.

I thrust myself betwixt her and the door.

"Past here you do not go until you tell me," I blustered.

"Dear heart!" she sighed. "Will he abuse maids always in this wise? And you can not guess? Really, sir? Aye, indeed, you will be stupid. More so than I kenned you."

She came and stood on tiptoe, with her lips close to mine.

"'Twas you."

And ere I could answer, in my dumb ecstasy, she was by me, and indoors directing the dressing of Sawney's wound.

'Tis to be said for Sawney that he supported without whining a hurt which must have crippled most men. He had a hole in his shoulder I could put two fingers in, and the bone was badly cracked. But he had no nerves, and he suffered us to wash it with whisky and water, and strap a bandage over it, and never flinched during the entire operation. I was loath to see Sheila touch the unclean rascal, and when he attempted to offer fulsome thanks, I cut him short.

"Fewer words," I told him sharply. "We would hear naught from you. Remember you are not an honored guest."

His lips curled back in ugly fashion over the blackened stumps of teeth in his jaws, but he made no answer. I had yet to learn that a snake is never powerless for evil until its back is broken.

The savory stew the nameless lass set

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before us put new strength into me, and I felt I could muster spirit once more to meet foes and difficulties. Afterwards, Sheila and I lay upon the ground in front of the hut, whence we could watch the approaches across the moor, and under the quickening rays of the sun Sheila soon dropped asleep. Presently the nameless lass came and sat by me.

"Ye wull be verra weary," she said.

"A little," I acknowledged.

"Ye wull hae ganged far syne ye came to Killin?"

"Yes, very far. I like not to think how far."

"Puir laddie!"

She patted me awkwardly with her big, toil-hardened hand.

"I will be wae for your young leddy, too," she added.

"It has been doubly hard for her."

And I told of our wanderings since Culloden, and how David had died in the flight from Ben Fionn. The girl listened with breathless interest.

"Him ye call David wull be the mon came to Killin' wi' ye?" she questioned.

"Yes."

"And the bonnie wee lassie yon wull be she ye came to seek?"

I assented. The girl stared broodingly at Sheila.

"Wad ye wed wi' her?" she demanded abruptly.

I laughed bitterly. The recital of our misfortunes had served to restore to me full comprehension of the manifold perils that surrounded us.

"'Tis our hope," I replied. "But what chance do we stand? We have escaped this latest peril, thanks to you. Yet we have no place to fly to, save it be France, and how shall we get there without money, food or friends?"

The girl knitted her heavy brows.

"Tak' hearrt," she urged. "Wha' ye lack the noo is just sleep. Lie ye doon, and I wull watch ower ye." Seeing me hesitate, she went on: "Nae, dinna be feared. I ken Sawney weell—and weell he kens me. If he tries any o' his skrim-skrangle ploys he wull get the bad end o' ma dirk to the throat o' him—and that wull be summat your young leddy wad best hae gied him whiles she could."

I needed no more persuasion, and 'twas dusk when I was aroused by this strange girl's voice in my ear.

"Up wi' ye," she whispered. "He will be back—him that calls himsel' ma feyther."

A light shone in the hut and the low mumble of Gaelic issued from the door. Whilst I listened to it, she awoke Sheila.

"Is he within?" I asked.

"Aye, Sawney wull be tellin' him how ye came here."

"Will he make trouble?"

"If he can so," she answered shortly.

I looked at Sheila.

"We had best come to an understanding at once," I suggested. I turned to the nameless lass, who seemed to have allied herself with us: "We can depend on you?"

Her eyes met mine squarely.

"Aye," she said. "Ye wullna be safe more nor the nicht—himsel' is greedy for gold and nae friendly to your likes. But if ye do as I bid ye, all wull be richt 'till the morrn."

"And what is that?"

"Do ye lie in the inner room. I wull be wi'oot. Nae hurrt wull come to ye."

"But suppose he steals away with word to the English soldiers that we are here?" I pointed out.

"I wad ken his ploy and ye wad hear frae me."

Sheila seized the girl's hands in both of her's.

"I would be telling you what a good friend you are to us," she cried, warmly. "We have no money or anything to reward you, but—"

"I want nae rewarrd."

"I am sure you would not," Sheila hastened to agree, "but is there naught we may do for you? If we invited you to leave this place and come with us, it might be a false kindness, for we are hunted, as you know, with a price on our heads, and we may not tell what fate will befall us. But you are welcome to come, if you will."

The dull eyes of the nameless lass brightened like stars.

"Ye—ye—wad tak' me wi' ye?" she said haltingly. "Ye are ower kind to me. But—but I canna gang wi' ye."

The brightness faded from her eyes, and before we could say more she led the way into the hut.

SAWNEY and the inn-keeper looked up guiltily as we entered, and the latter got to his feet and commenced to rub his hands in the folds of his dirty kilt, exactly as he had done when he received David and me at Killin.

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"This wullna be a looked-for pleasure, sir," he muttered. "It wull go harrd wi' me if the sojers ken ye hae been alow ma roof."

"They will know nothing unless you tell them," I retorted. "And mark this: we are desperate people, and we will not suffer any Campbell tricks. For your health's sake you had best be careful with us."

"Oh, aye, I meant nae harrm, shentlemon," he whined. "These be harrd times for honest stay-at-hame bodies."

"I think you said something like that once before," I recalled drily.

Sawney eyed me slyly as I spoke, but remained silent, evidently having had his lesson.

There was little else said—and when we had eaten our supper of bannocks and cold water Sheila and I retired into the back room, for we planned to leave the hut by sunrise, and it behooved us to get all the sleep we might under a weather-tight roof. For Sheila I arranged a pallet of heather and rushes in the middle of the floor, whilst I lay across the entrance.

The wooden shutters to the windows were bolted, and 'twas pitch-dark, save for a streak of firelight that crept under the door. I lay wakeful for a few minutes, listening to the buzzing of voices in the Gaelic on the other side of the partition. Finally I slept.

Some time before dawn I awoke in a cold sweat.

I lay mentally benumbed for a space, wondering what had bestirred me. Then I heard a truly awful sound, a bubbling, choking cry for help, a cry instinct with agony and passion.

Sheila heard it, too, and beside me rushed into the outer room. Through the half-darkness the embers of the hearth-fire cast a faint glare that accentuated the shadows, and all I could make out was a vague something that swayed and staggered in a far corner.

Another shadowy heap lay motionless in front of the hearth.

'Twas Sheila grasped the situation first.

"He is killing the lass!" she screamed. "Quick, Frank! He has his dirk in her!"

I leaped forward, but too late. The reeling shadows fell apart. Jamey Campbell, the inn-keeper of Killin, dropped by the door, a huge gash over his heart, and the nameless lass sank into my arms, the blood bubbling from her lips.

Her gaze met mine as I caught her.

"He — wad — hae — stabbit — ye—whiles—ye—slept," she gasped in short, strangling breaths. "Himsel' — and — Sawney."

I carried her into the firelight and gave her whisky, and Sheila opened her smock and tried to quench the blood that flowed slowly from the wound in her right breast. Her eyes, ordinarily so dull and lifeless, lit with a mocking gleam.

"Nae—use," she whispered. "I—bleed—inside."

A pause.

"I — wull — be — gey — glad — to — die."

She drank a little more whisky and seemed to breath easier.

"Wull — Sawney — be — deid?" she asked hoarsely.

I reached over and jerked the plaid off the nearest body. Yes, 'twas Sawney, dead, sure, this time, stabbed through and through.

"I—stabbit—him," she murmured with a touch of triumph, infinitely pathetic. "They — were — for — dirkin' — ye — and — Sawney — was — to — tak' — your heads — to Fort — William. Himsel' — was — to — share — the — rewarrd. But — I —wadna — let — them — and — himsel' — said — 'cut — the — hizzy' s — throat.'"

I had to give her more whisky.

"Sawney — gaed — to — the door — and — I gaed — befower — him. He — said — he — wad — stab — me — but — I — stabbit — him."

She laughed, and the blood frothed on her lips.

"Do not be trying to speak," Sheila begged her.

"For — why? I — hae — but — a — wee — time — left."

A gray pallor crept across her face.

"Do — ye — mind — wha' — ye — gied — me — in — Killin?" she said to me, with the rattle in her throat.

I nodded, unable to speak.

"I — liked — it — fine," she answered, and died.

We laid her very gently on the earthen floor, and Sheila turned to me a face stricken with terror.

"Oh, let us be going," she cried. "Let us flee from this horrible place!"

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CHAPTER XXIX

A PRINCE INDEED

WE STAYED in that house of death no longer than was necessary to collect our weapons and a bag of meal from the cupboard, with an iron plate to cook it on. 'Twas yet dark, but we turned our backs on the rievers' hut without regret—rather, with a glad thankfulness. At the door I looked back once. The embers flickered, and in their uncertain light the nameless lass lay very peaceful, her arms thrown wide. Her murderers were huddled in the shadows, dim shapes of evil.

I closed the door softly, and rejoined Sheila. As by a common instinct, we began to run. We ran and ran, scarce seeing our way, never a thought to direction, until we were stopped by exhaustion. We were on the west bank of Loch Ba, close to the scene of our fight. In the distance browsed the pony of the gillie I had shot.

"I forgot the pony!" I exclaimed, when I had regained my breath. "I will go back and get him."

"Go back?" panted Sheila. "You will not be doing so! Not for a dozen ponies!"

"But you can stay here."

"Without you? Frank, I would not be alone for worlds! We will do well enough without the pony. I want no memories of this ghastly tragedy."

Afar in the east, beyond the hills of Atholl, a spear of crimson shot into the velvet Summer sky. The dawn was at hand.

"See," I said, and pointed. "We may not stay here after it is light. Where shall we go?"

She thought.

"West there are the Campbells and the soldiers beating the country for us from Fort William," she said slowly. "South will be the Lowlands, and the Forth will be guarded so close we could never cross it—let alone, the pair of us would not have a friend to go to, if we did. East will be Atholl, and the duke, Lord George's Hanoverian brother, will surely be keeping a straight watch out for all his friends."

"That leaves us the north," I reflected. "What have we to hope there?"

"Well," says Sheila, "there may be little enough hope in it, but it will be better than elsewhere. If we may win into Badenoch there is a wild, rough country such as the English cannot put down, and it may chance we would find friends. Lochiel should be thereabouts, I have heard."

"Is it far?"

"A day's journey, mayhap."

I jumped up.

"Then let us be moving."

We skirted the west bank of Loch Ba, and by sunrise were passing betwixt the height of the Black Corries on our left and the sinuous length of Loch Lydoch. We halted here, and mixed crowdy from the oatmeal in our bag and the lake water, and then walked on, our way growing more rugged as we advanced.

Rannoch Moor was behind us, and an ocean of forest-clad peaks rolled on every side. The sense of comfort we secured from this isolation was tremendous. It was as though all the Redcoats had been driven from the world. We felt safer than in our hiding places in the Braes of Slioch.

For hours we saw never a soul nor the suspicion of a human dwelling, but in the late afternoon, as we were climbing a pass which cleaves Carn Dearg from Ben Pharlagain, we rounded a corner of rocks to find ourselves confronting a small, elderly person in a vile scratch-wig, a battered tri-corn hat, a rain-stained coat of tarnished blue plush and kilt and hose. He had a considerable pack upon his back and leaned upon a staff, his other hand being engaged in fondling the butt of a pistol which protruded from a coat-pocket.

"Hoot, noo, ma loons, wha' be ye?" he demanded. "Dinna move, for I hae the twa o' ye covered frae ma pocket."

I stared at him, curiously puzzled. His blue eyes, with their whimsical wrinkles—where had I seen them before?

"Sir," I said politely, "you are a pedler?"

"Aye," he returned with something of a start, "and ye wull be an Englishmon."

"A peddler," I observed, disregarding his remark, "is not to be expected in this remote spot. May I inquire——"

"Ye micht inquire all ye wull, laddie," he answered, "but that's nae sayin' I wull fill your lug wi' wisdom. Hauld still."

And he slung his pack to the road beside him.

As he did so, he commenced to whistle a ranting, lightsome tune:

> And Charlie he's my darling,
> My darling, my darling,
> And Charlie he's my darling,
> The Young Chevalier.

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Both Sheila and I started with surprise.

"You will be for the Good Cause?" she said.

"The Guid Cause? That wull just depend on wha' ye call guid."

He came closer to us.

"It wullna be comprehenseeble," he muttered, "but, certes, I hae——"

The truth struck me, and I sprang at him so quickly that he hauled out his pistol and sternly bade me again "to hauld still."

"But, man, Doctor MacLeod," I cried—"or is it Johnny Gordon now?—don't you know us? I am Captain Chisholm. This is Miss MacRoss."

He put the pistol back in his pocket, and the wrinkles about his eyes tightened in a grimace.

"Ma puir bairnies, ye wull be sair lanky to wha' I ken o' ye! And I thocht ye waur awa' and awa' in the hills of Slioch!"

He shooks hands cordially, and produced a little pipe, which he filled and smoked with gusto.

"So," he continued to Sheila, "ye wull be the lassie they brocht to me after Falkirk fight? A braw, brave lassie ye are, too. For why are the twa o' ye wanderin' the hills by your lain?"

There was nothing for it but to sit down and tell him the whole story, and a splendid auditor he made, interrupting no more than for an occasional "God save us!" or "Do ye tell me!" At the end of it I requested his own experiences.

"Ah," said he cunningly, "but that wull be anotherr matter. I am nae playin' a lain hand."

"Well," I replied, "setting that aside—and we have no wish to pry into your private affairs—can you put us in the way of finding Lochiel or other friends in this region?"

He pondered, sitting on his pack by the wayside.

"If 'tis to put you to any difficulty, pray do not think of it," I said, nettled by his deliberation.

"Nae, nae, ye mistak' me," he returned unhurriedly. "It wull be a gey guid thing for ye we met. Look ye, noo, I wadna deserrt ye. But it wants deleeberation, and I canna settle it in ma ain mind. Come your ways wi' me, and I wull do wha' I can for ye."

With that he shouldered his pack again and led the way up the pass. He showed no more desire for conversation, and ignored several questions I asked him as to the advantages of pedling in Badenoch. The one time he spoke was when we reached the crest of the pass, and saw, spread out before us, a wilderness of mountains and forests surpassing that we had recently traversed.

From the heart of the tangle was upthrust a great corrugated mass divided into several different peaks, which dominated the entire landscape.

"Ben Alder," he explained briefly, and stood contemplating it in a brown study.

After dark he led us into the forest at the mountain's foot, and presently we were challenged by armed gillies who conducted us to a hut built amongst boulders. Here Dr. MacLeod signified that we were to pass the night, and he helped us prepare bannocks and sent a gillie to a nearby spring for water. But still he withheld all information as to our destination.

In the morning there was a delay. The doctor had disappeared, and the two gillies who were left in charge of us declined to talk, even when Sheila blandished them in the Gaelic. Our custodian was back by noon, however, and seemingly in good spirits.

"Weell, here's luck for ye," he exclaimed, and winked slyly.

"How is that?" I asked.

"Dinna gang sae fast, laddie. Ye wull ken all in guid time."

"I think you will be most provoking," declared Sheila indignantly. "Why must you make a mystery of everything? Will you not trust us? Say so, and we will begone elsewhere."

"Saft, saft," protested the doctor in alarm. "My certes, lassie, but ye hae a sharrp tongue."

"I will thank you to be calling me Miss MacRoss," rebuked Sheila with her chin in the air.

"I wull ask your pardon, ma'am," returned the doctor gravely, and he bent his back like a dancing-master.

When we started I noted that the pack was not in evidence. It must have been carried on by one of the gillies during the night. The doctor led us by goat-tracks which scrambled precariously up the mighty sides of Ben Alder, sometimes at an angle so steep that we were obliged to hold to the tree-trunks to keep ourselves from falling

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backward. Twice parties of gillies stopped us, and only permitted us to go on when our guide gave them a pass-word.

SEVERAL hours of this brought us upon the higher slopes of the mountain. The forest thinned, and we heard voices and perceived a curious hut woven in and among the trees. It was invisible at a little distance.

The rocky brow of the mountain was its back, and boards and branches were the other walls, the corner-posts and uprights being living trees. In that pleasant Summer weather, with the green foliage everywhere, I could imagine no more delightful outdoor habitation.

"Cluny's Cage," said Dr. MacLeod, with a wave of his hand.

"What? Is Cluny here?" cried Sheila.

"Aye." The doctor grinned. "And more nor himsel'."

"Who?"

"Lochiel, for one."

Sheila clapped her hands.

"Oh, that will be splendid," she cried.

There was a hail in the Gaelic as she spoke, and we climbed upon a kind of platform outside the hut, where sat the dignified chief of clan Cameron and the slighter, more dandified MacPherson of Cluny. Both had been friends of Sheila's father, and they greeted her with a warmth that did my heart good. She was in the midst of her relations of our adventures, when a light, firm step sounded in the leafy hut and Lochiel and Cluny got up.

I rose, too, mechanically, thinking to see some other exiled chieftain.

"Visitors? Gad'slife, 'tis a treat! What virtues have I acquired that Providence should be so kind to me?" Those ringing tones! My brain whirled. Could it be—But Sheila's glad voice answered me.

"Oh, your Royal Highness!" she gasped.

Prince Charles lifted her up.

" 'Tis not right you should kneel before me, Miss MacRoss," he told her soberly. "Nor you, either, Captain Chisholm. I owe my friends and subjects too much ever to desire to see them kneel to me again. I should infinitely prefer to kneel to them."

"And you are safe and well, sir?" asked Sheila.

"Faith, you see me here! Safe?" He smiled upon us all. "As safe as the rest of you. Well? I protest I was never in such health. Do but look at me."

Sure, there was scant resemblance between this virile, lithe, sturdy young man, clear-eyed and pink-cheeked, and the pallid, pasty princeling who had gamed and wined at Inverness under the shadow of Culloden. And as Prince Charles sketched briefly for us his story, I understood how the transformation had been accomplished.

Aye, here was a prince, indeed! Months in the heather, skulking even as Sheila and David and I had skulked; in the stormy seas about the Western Isles; in the mist-hung hills of Skye, in Morar and Knoidart and Glen Moriston and many other barren localities—months of starvation and thirst and toil and peril, missing no privation or humiliation—these had set their mark upon Charles Edward Stuart; come very near making a great man out of him.

I have sometimes wondered, if the chance had come to him again, with the time of trial still fresh in his soul— But such speculations are futile. 'Tis results that count. And instead of the heroic figure of chivalric daring we have before us the sodden spectacle of the brandy-soaked roué at Rome, who drains his life away, dram by dram, crushed beneath the ruin of the cause that expected so much from him. Ah, me! If princes only were not human!

He was all earnestness as he talked, reciting how he had escaped capture in Skye through the devotion of that brave girl, Miss Flora MacDonald; and how the "Seven Men of Glen Moriston," the most desperate bandits of the Highlands, had sheltered and guarded him for three weeks, when he was utterly worn out by his fatigues; and how, wherever he had gone, always there had been some man, well-born or humble, ready to help him and care for him, until another appeared better equipped to assist their sovereign.

"Four months it has been," he said with emphasis. "For four months thousands of troops have hunted me—precisely as unfortunates like yourselves have been hunted. But for me they offered a reward of thirty thousand pounds. In this time hundreds have known my secret—and there has not been one traitor. Gentlemen, Miss MacRoss, I defy you to search history and find a case of nation-wide loyalty to match with this! I do not deserve it, but after all, 'tis more to Scotland's honor than to mine."

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The tears welled in his eyes, and he choked with emotion.

"I feel it deeply," he continued simply. "'Tis difficult to believe a cause so nobly upborne can be lost."

"'Tis not lost, sir," said Lochiel solemnly, and we all echoed him.

"Aye, time's touchstone must make us over again," rejoined the Prince gayly. "And now Captain Chisholm, do you tell us the diverting and highly romantic adventures sustained by your lady and yourself. 'Odslife, man, I envy you. My misfortunes have been sufficiently exciting, but I never knew the joys of knight errantry.

"In Skye 'twas always Miss MacDonald squired me, and into the bargain I was tired in skirts and petticoats—a fearsome creature, I do assure you. Come, your story, and Miss MacRoss shall sit by and correct you if you grow bashful or too modest."

We talked so, I remember, all the rest of that afternoon and far into the night, and when at last the Prince was satisfied, he must needs turn himself and his gentlemen out of their hut in order that Sheila might sleep comfortably. He lay with the rest of us on the leveled terrace among the trees. But before he slept he drew me to one side.

"Captain Chsiholm," he said, "I have long had it in my mind to say to you that I once did you a grave injustice. Nay, sir, do not attempt to check me. An apology is good for the soul of a prince. I speak in all humbleness, sir. I am a man, I take it, little older than yourself, and I have had on my back burdens to which, I fear, I have not been equal. I ask you to consider that, if you ever think of me.

"Your attitude with regard to Lord George was such as a gentleman should have held. You were loyal to yourself—and to me. I have no staff to restore you to, but I should like to be able to number you among my friends. And doubt not, his Majesty, my father, shall hear of your kindness to me, if I live to see him again."

CHAPTER XXX

EXILE

IN THE morning the Prince bade me to walk with him in the wood.

"As I understand it," says he kindly "you and Miss MacRoss are betrothed?"

"That is true, sir."

"Well," he went on, "I would not have you misunderstand me for a great deal, Chisholm, but has it occurred to you that you and she have been living on a plane far from conventional?"

"It has," I agreed, "but I trust your Royal Highness will appreciate that in times such as we have passed through convention becomes a mockery. No woman should be subjected to what Miss MacRoss has been obliged to suffer, yet in no way could she have escaped it, save by submitting to imprisonment—which must have meant that she would have been handed over to the tender mercies of Gairloch."

I daresay I showed some heat in this, for the Prince smiled.

"Tut," said he, "will you do exactly as I warned you not to? Go to, man. I have but the one more question to ask. Is it still your desire to wed?"

My face answered him, for he burst out laughing, without giving me opportunity to reply.

"'Odsblood, I knew it!" he cried. "And as your sovereign, Chisholm, 'tis obviously my bounden duty to assist you, my loyal subjects, to the attainment of your happiness."

"But how—" I began.

"We will consult with MacLeod," he returned, "and see if his pack is capable of containing a parson."

"Why, what part does the doctor play?" I inquired in some curiosity as we made our way back to the hut.

"The doctor? Oh, he is the keystone of our social structure here!" The Prince broke out laughing once more. "He and his pack! You must know, Chisholm, we have cause to keep in touch with our friends roundabout us, and none seems to have so aptly the knack of fooling the English and his own brethren as MacLeod.

"In his scratch-wig, with his pack on his back, he ventures up to the very gates of Fort William, and whilst he brings us the food we can not come by in these wilds, he secures what is even more valuable—I mean information of the movements of the soldiers and their intentions. Whenever we desire anything, we send for the doctor. Is it a pack of cards? Faith, he gets it! A bottle of rum? He finds it by the wayside. A clean shirt? He robs the nearest Whig magistrate. Now shall we put him to the final proof. Can he procure us a parson?"

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We found Dr. MacLeod squatting on the terrace, busily engaged in brewing a punch. It required a royal command to induce him to lay aside his occupation.

"Weell, weell, if ye maun, ye maun," he grumbled, wiping his hands on the soiled skirts of his wondrous plush coat. "But I hauld your Royal Highness to witness I wullna be responseeble for the punch when ye call me awa' at the most deleecate moment o' the concoction."

"There is a much more important matter than punch-making to the fore, doctor," replied the Prince. "Have you a clergyman anywhere about you?"

"What's that?"

"I asked you had you a clergyman anywhere about you—you are not particular as to denomination, I take it, Captain Chisholm?"

Dr. MacLeod wrinkled up his eyes and whistled low.

"So the wind wull be frae that quarter! Aweell, sir, I wadna be ower deeligent in this wise for every mon. But Chisholm is an exception o' sorrts. Outower, he wull be an auld friend."

He gave me a wink.

"How wad Dr. John Cameron, Lochiel's britherr, meet your ends?"

"The very man!" exclaimed the Prince. "Dr. Cameron is in hiding not far from here, Captain Chisholm. We will send for him at once. He should be here by to-night or tomorrow morning."

From that moment some master wizard waved his wand over Sheila and me and spirited our troubles away. Prince Charles and his friends and servants set themselves out to make us happy. No exertion was too tedious for the Prince. A meal of banquet proportions was prepared; the hut was decorated; and Dr. MacLeod was told to brew as much punch as he liked. Through the bustle and confusion Sheila and I moved like twin souls in a glorious dream.

The terrible past was so recent, and yet so far behind us. 'Twas difficult to believe that but yesterday we had witnessed the the tragedy of the rievers' hut, fought the duel with Gairloch and his minions on Rannoch Moor, experienced the agonies of Fort William's noisome dungeons. Up here on Ben Alder the air was fresh and pure, captivity seemed impossible.

Dr. Cameron arrived late that night, too late to perform the ceremony, 'twas agreed. So Sheila was bidden by the Prince to secure a beauty sleep, and he and his gentlemen played cards on the platform. When they invited me to sit in the game, I excused myself, and Prince Charles gave me a strange look.

Presently he laid down his hand and came over to me.

"You have no prejudice against the cards?" he asked.

"Nay, sir, I enjoy a game with pleasure."

"Ah, then, you are out of funds?"

"'Tis so, sir."

He placed his hand on my shoulder.

"For God's sake, Chisholm," he said as earnestly as ever I heard him speak, "could you not tell me so? Are we not companions in adventure? Have you not risked everything you owned in my cause—and lost it? What I have is to be shared with you. 'Tis little enough at this present, in sooth, but you are welcome to it."

He reached into his pocket and extracted a handful of guineas—not many, and as I learned later, actually all he had—the half of which he forced into my unwilling hands.

"But, sir," I protested, "you will require more than this to get to France, and indeed, I need naught——"

"Silence, sir!" he ordered. "Think on it that with the morrow you will be a wedded man and your responsibilities doubled. Even on Ben Alder, I dare wager, a woman can find use for guineas."

He grew serious again.

"When we do reach France, Chisholm, you need have no cause to worry. I have some interest at Versailles, and I can assure you a post or at least a pension, until something better offers."

So I joined the circle at the cards and lost a third of my royal pocket money.

How shall I speak of our wedding the next morning? We had the great cathedral of the forest to hold the ceremony in, and all about us the birds chanted a *Te Deum* of praise and thanksgiving that blended with the quiet, even tones of the minister's voice. There was no pomp or circumstance.

We stood there on the platform beside the hut in our ragged garments, and the company consisted of the Prince, Lochiel, Cluny, Dr. MacLeod and a handful of gillies and servants. The Prince gave the bride away. He was the most self-possessed

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member of the party, and appeared to enjoy it almost as much as we two.

Sheila was girlishly sweet, for all her boy's gear. Already, her cheeks were beginning to fill out and they were tinged with color. Her eyes were moistly bright. Mayhap I am prejudiced, but I will maintain no lovelier bride was ever admired than she.

When Prince Charles came up to receive his kiss she gave it to him blushingly, and he returned it with true Stuart appreciation.

"Mistress Chisholm," says he, "I doubt this is all the gift I am able to give you, but hold it in mortgage for a bauble worth while from the shopmasters of the Palais Royale."

He was as good as his word, and Bonnie Prince Charlie's brooch is one of the treasures of Chisholm Castle.

After we had graced the banquet a reasonable length of time we were dispatched under care of two gillies, who were assigned by Cluny as our servants, to the hut at the foot of the mountain, where we had slept our first night on Ben Alder, and here we spent our honeymoon.

THE two weeks that followed were as perfect as man and maid could ask. Yet all seasons of pleasure must end. One night we were aroused by a thundering at the door. Before the entrance stood a little group of men, headed by Prince Charles.

"Great news, Chisholm!" he hailed me. "The ships have come from France. They are awaiting us in Lochnanaugh. We start for Moidart tomorrow."

All the party on Ben Alder accompanied the Prince, save Cluny, who could not be induced to forsake his clansmen. He lingered on in his odd hiding-place for some years more, always hunted and never found, and then escaped to France, where, like so many other Scotsmen, including our brave friend Lochiel, he soon died of disappointment and longing for his misty hills.

We traveled only by night and with the greatest care, and on the nineteenth of September reached a point on the shores of Lochnanaugh, whence we might see the two ships *L'Heureux* and *La Princesse de Conti* awaiting us.

Some scores of refugees from the neighborhood, who had received warning of the vessels' coming, were on board when we arrived; but the Prince insisted upon our remaining in the Loch another twenty-four hours, to permit any who had been delayed to reach the coast. On the twentieth, a Saturday, the anchors were weighed and we stood out to sea—twenty-three of the gentry and one hundred and seven common men.

The bulwarks of *L'Heureux*, on which we sailed with Prince Charles, were lined with weeping exiles. They stretched out their arms toward the receding land, and the mournful strains of "Lochaber No More" wailed over the waters. Alas, many of them were never to see their Highland homes again—although every soul on the ship, from the Prince down to the meanest gillie, was sure we should be returning a few months hence, with French gold and bayonets to bolster us.

Sheila put her head on my shoulder and wept with the rest.

"Oh, dear lad," she sobbed, "I never knew I might be happy and sad all at the same time. I am gay glad to be getting you out of the cruel danger, but my heart is sore leaving the hills and—and—my clan will be no more!"

"Sweetheart," I answered, "the clans can never be crushed. Their powers may be taken from the chiefs, the tartans may be prohibited for a while, arms may be confiscated. But no race of men and women so loyal, brave and honorable will pass out of existence. There is a new day coming for Scotland, and you and I must see to it that the Clan Ross has its share when that day comes."

She dried her eyes, smiling at me through the tears.

"Whatever would I have done had you not decided to beat me that night in Derby!" she sighed.

"But I did not beat you," I objected indignantly.

"I am not so sure," says she.

POSTSCRIPTUM

Chisholm Castle in Suffolk,
ye 12th April, 1747.

MINE OWN DEAR LAD:

This is to Tell you that mine eyes are Hungry for a sight of youre face and of youre Wife, too—Sweet Chit, I hope she does well. I have been busy about the Task of youre Pardon, and you must not Chide me if I have seemed Dilatory, for indeed, youre Evil Friends in the late Uprising have sorely disturbed His Majesty's Ministers. But all seem Venial at Westminster these times, and I am persuaded at last the right gentleman's Price has been

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paid. 'Twould be manifestly unwise did I name the Scoundrel to you.

Take heart, then, deere lad, and Wait but a Few Weeks longer. If all is not Accomplished by that term, I shall be fain to make the Crossing, tho' certes 'twould be a Parlous Venture at mine age. 'Swounds, I must have a sight of that Son you writ so takingly of—a marvelous little Creature, I make no doubt.

Youre friend Sawtelle has been to see me on his way Londonward—a fine Fellow and a Loyal. He is back in favor at Court he tells me, none the worser for the Black Looks of C-ber-d. He bade me tell You the Months he spent in Edinburgh Castle were a Great Relief from the butcher-work he was Undertaking. He says His Hanoverian Majesty is settled down comfortable again and sleeps nights, unfearing of the Young Chevalier.

Sad tales we hear of youre Sovereign, Frank. 'Tis rumored Now he is at Loggerheads with the French and Lord George has Left him in Disgust.

If you require additional Funds you have only to communicate with Mr. Benson in Greys Inn. He has instructions to comply with youre Requests. He has writ me, too, he is pushing Forward the matter of the MacRoss lands. For such of the Folk as have been Deported there is naught to be Done. Others we have helped as may be.

These affairs Move slowly, as you must Understand; but rest Easy youre Wife's estates and people will be Looked to. I would as much could be done for all the Clans. 'Tis a harsh, bloody Business and will Leave a Bad Taste in the Mouths of another Generation.

The candle flickers, Frank, and my Wrist grows weary. I can Scrawl no more. Commend me to Mistress Sheila. God send you Home soon.

Thine affectionate, loving Uncle,
Chisholm.

THE END

CAMP FARE

by C. HILTON-TURVEY

DUMP the coffee—let 'er go!
Set the beans a-sizzlin'
Slash the corn-bread into hunks,
Get the 'taters frizzlin'.

Where's the bacon? Left behind!
What'll we do about it?
Campers' luck—but, gosh, who cares?
Get along without it.

'Tain't so much, but my! it beats
Cookin'-schools all holler.
Couldn't get a better "eats"
If you paid a dollar.

Plain and simple—tasty though—
Appetite's a-rampin'.
Want but little here below
When we're goin' campin'.

So, in war-time months to come,
Luxuries go swampin'—
Don't you get to feelin' glum.
Play you're goin' campin'.

Can't get lots of "eats" you like?
Have a leaner platter?
Say, "We left the stuff behind—
Shucks! It doesn't matter."

What's the use of feelin' blue,
Gettin' mad and champin'?
SURE it's good enough for you—
When Uncle Sam's a-campin'!

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Gray Flannel

by George L. Catton

Author of "Old Dad," The Gift of Experience," etc.

ALONE and a complete stranger, the little French breed suddenly appeared at Fort Abitibi.

When the last Cree had parted with his last castor—slivers of wood used as money by The Hudson Bay Co. in trading with the Indians—and departed with the little bundle of necessities that his Winter's trap of musquash and beaver skins had purchased, Munga MacLean, chief trader at Fort Abitibi, turned to the little breed by the stove.

"Weel, mon," he growled irritably, "what is it ye're wantin'? Ye said ye'd wait till I'd finished wi' the tradin', an' that's twa days noo. Speak up!"

The little breed crossed the trading-room and pulled a dirty cloth bag out of the breast of his capote. And when he spoke his English was better than that used by the most of his kind.

"I need some tings and I have no money. I teenk mahbe you tak heem—no?" And he turned the bag out on a bale of cloth.

The scowl on MacLean's face disappeared. He gasped. MacLean had wasted five years of his youth in Queensland and he knew raw gold when he saw it.

"No money, ye said?" He picked up the largest of the handful of nuggets and weighed it in his palm. "Mon dear, that's money in ony country in the worrrld! Where did you get that?"

The little breed shrugged his shoulders.

"I no steal heem."

And the resentful note in his voice told the trader that that was the only answer to that question he would ever give.

"I ken ye didna," MacLean bristled. "I ken well that ye found it somewhere i' the hills. Lift it, mon. Bring it over tae the powder balance."

And then as he piled the weights on the other pan of the balance, MacLean's appraising eye told him that the four pounds, troy, of it was all of eighty per cent. pure gold.

"Ye've forrrty-eight ounces of it," he burred gruffly. "I'll allow ye twenty guineas in trade for the lot?"

For a moment the little breed eyed the trader malevolently. Then he shrugged his shoulders indifferently, and turned away to pick what he wanted from the piles of stores.

So the little breed came to Fort Abitibi with his gold and departed with his supplies. No one had ever seen him till he appeared at the post; and all Summer, till he came again in September he wasn't seen again. And when he came the second time he brought more gold—big solid nuggets, like lead with the pure weight of them. But when he departed the second time, two Indians trailed him—for MacLean.

For all of seventy miles to the east the Indians trailed him. Through the waterways, over the rapids and portages the two Crees kept just out of sight behind him. Then one night they lost him.

With his canoe deep in the water with the weight of his supplies, the little breed

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paddled across a narrow lake, and around a bluff in the shore-line. And when the Indians rounded the bluff twenty minutes later, he was gone. The moonlight on the water lay rippleless; the black shore shadows, motionless. He was gone. Though they spent two days searching the shores for the spot where he must have landed, the two Crees never found it. Yet the following March when the Indians came into Fort Abitibi with their fur, Munga MacLean weighed up another handful of those solid little nuggets.

Twice a year, Spring and Fall, for seven years the little breed came to the post with his gold and departed with his supplies. Spring and Fall for seven years the Indians, and occasionally a white man, trailed him. Yet he always eluded them. Always he waited for the darkness of night to paddle around that bluff in the shore-line of the lake, seventy miles to the east.

Then, as suddenly as he came he stopped coming. No one ever saw him again. He came unknown. He departed without a word of farewell. And no one doubted that he had been killed for his gold; only the gold was never found.

He said his name was Wasson, when MacLean inquired; but watching his face when he said it, MacLean knew that that was not his name. And because of his diminutive stature, MacLean called him Wee Wasson.

The Indians listened to the trader and called the little breed, Weewasson. They named the lake where they always lost him, after him, and accredited his ability to elude them to evil spirits. Then they infested the lake and the district around it with the specter of their imagination and fought shy of it.

That was in 1860.

The lake is still called Weewasson. The little breed's gold was never found. The weird tales of the Crees have been handed down to the present generation as Indian legends.

II

BOB HOUSTON would not allow any one to dictate his future to him. Bob Houston knew there would be a stool in the office of his father's lumber business waiting for him when he finished his education, and he didn't want it. He wanted to start flat-footed, as he put it. Two-shouldered and two-fisted, built for pursuits of the big outdoors, the mere thought of pushing a pencil under a roof all day made him pull at his collar, and throw his windows wide even in the most rigid Winter weather.

So unknown to his father he specialized in metallurgy; the study of metals and the methods of their extraction argued the blue sky and the unwalled rooms of the trackless wastes. And then when he and "Pop" Sharp, his father's oldest camp-boss staked two claims on a big deposit of cuprite, while on a fishing-trip in the Summer holidays, his half-formed plan matured.

Bob knew that his father's only weakness was a vast opinion of his own ability, and that any plan he framed to keep clear of that office stool must hinge on that weakness. To tell his father of the copper find wouldn't change his decision; and to tell him that it was located on the north shore of Lake Superior, at the headwaters of the Pie River—in a section where he himself had taken off the timber without finding the deposit—would only clinch that decision. Consequently, when Bob came home at Christmas to stay, he was all ready for trouble. When he was shown that office stool a month later he promptly shook his head.

"Nothing doing, dad," he announced decidedly.

"Big Tam" Houston dropped into his desk chair and eyed his son through half-drawn lids. In his determined mind there had been but the one future for Bob: the seat he himself now sat in — when he left it. And the only way up to that seat must be through every branch of the business.

It had never occurred to him that Bob, a son of his father, would likewise have a mind of his own. He was too astounded to speak.

"So!" he finally managed to growl. "You're too proud to start in the cellar, eh?"

"That's just what's what, dad," Bob affirmed emphatically. "I'm too proud to start in anybody's cellar. "Look—" he pushed up his coat sleeve and shirt cuff—"that's an arm, dad. Beef; big double knots of bloody-red beef wrapped around a two-inch bar of ivory. And this—" he tapped his head—"that's a head—I wear a seven and a quarter hat when my hair's short. That's a head and an arm that

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belong to me—to me! And you ask me to start in the cellar of your business? No, dad. I'm going to start flat-footed. I'm going to get out on the sod and dig my own cellar."

Big Tam piled his feet up on his desk, and for the last time in his life he boasted his old pet boast.

"Dig your own cellar?" he sneered angrily. "Why, you young ass, you're forty years behind the times. The cellars are all dug! Forty years ago we old-timers started to dig the cellars. We had to. And you can bet your last nickel that we dug them all. Now—you young fellows will have to get down in the hole and go to work on the building!"

Bob smiled sarcastically.

"I claim you're wrong, dad," he protested quietly. "You old-timers, as you call yourselves, came out here with a gray flannel shirt and an ax and found a nice virgin world waiting for you. And what did you do? You shut your eyes and waded into it. You cut and slashed and carved and killed. You burned and buried millions of dollars' worth of the finest timber and fur-bearing animals in the world—just because they were in your way.

"You wanted cleared land. All you knew was cleared land to stick a plow into. And you got it. And now the few of you who are left claim that you've opened up the country, uncovered all its wealth—dug all the cellars. And I claim that you're wrong. I claim that you've missed more than you got. I claim that for every dollar you've taken off the land, you've wasted ten and missed another ten."

Big Tam snorted. He bounced out of his swivel chair and doubled up his mighty fist.

"You young fool!" he roared savagely. "You mean to sit there and tell me—me—that I've missed more than I've got? 'Got one dollar and missed ten'? Why, you—" He never finished that sentence.

Bob jumped to his feet. With one ripping jerk he wrenched the collar from his neck and flung it into the waste-basket.

"Listen, dad!" he snapped. "I'm going to prove it to you. I'm going to pull on a gray flannel shirt. I'm going to take just the sum of money that you had in your pocket when you landed here forty years ago. I'm going to pick out a section where you yourself have cut off the timber, that you consider stripped of its wealth, and dig a cellar on it for myself. And if I can't take at least two dollars off that section for every dollar you got, and do it in a year, I'll—well, then if I fail I'll walk right in there and climb up on that stool. But I won't climb it till I do fail!"

Big Tam dropped his menacing fist. He strode to the window and stood for a full minute looking down on the crowded street. When he came back to his desk only his eyes betrayed the hell in his mind.

"Bob," he rasped, "I've got to leave the city for a week on important business. While I'm away I'll mill this over in my mind. I'll be back Thursday next. Don't mention this at the house—we'll keep our business confined to the office. Next Thursday morning you come down here and I'll give you an answer to your challenge. Now get out!"

Bob went. When he reached the street there was a broad grin on his face. If his father accepted his challenge, he would pick out that Pie River section. Pop Sharp had told him that the cut of timber from that section had been light, had been worth less than fifteen thousand dollars. And with copper at its present price, he could more than double that sum in a year.

But Bob was counting his chickens.

III

BIG Tam Houston was leaning over a map spread across his desk when Bob sat down in the office that following Thursday morning. He dropped back into his chair immediately and came straight to the point.

"I'm going to accept your challenge, Bob," he announced evenly. "When I landed here forty years ago I had just forty-two pounds sterling, in my belt. I'll give you its equivalent—two hundred and ten dollars. Wait—" he held up his hand—"don't interrupt me. I am going to hold that stool in there *vacant* for a year, Bob. And I am going to give you the Weewasson Lake section."

"But——" Bob sprang to his feet. He wanted, must have the Pie River section! But before he could voice his objection his father grabbed his arm.

"Wait till I'm through!" he roared and he jammed his finger down on the map. "There's Weewasson Lake there—where the

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78th crosses the 48th North. It's one hundred and forty-odd miles north of North Bay. You'll have the lake and all the ground for five miles in every direction from its shores to dig your cellar in."

"But—" Bob tried once more.

"Sit down!" Big Tam roared. And then when Bob was seated again—

"I'm giving you that section for two reasons," he rasped. "First, because I know to a nickel what the timber was worth that I took off it—twenty-eight thousand dollars. And second, because when we cut in there twenty-five years ago, I was all over it myself and I know that I missed nothing. Now—when do you want to get away?"

Bob reached for his hat and studied its crown a moment. His father had twisted his plan into a hard knot, and that tone of finality in his voice warned him that there was no alternative. It was either Weewasson Lake or the stool. To refuse both meant a break with his father, and he didn't want that. Whereas, if he took the Weewasson Lake section he would get at least a year's freedom from the stool in the office. And who knows? A hundred miles west of it in the same height of land, gold had been found the Summer before. He decided.

Bob was no quitter. He had issued a challenge, and though an unforeseen contingency had made certain failure very apparent at the finish, he would go through with it. There was nothing else that he could do—gracefully.

"The sooner I can get away, the better, dad," he smiled sheepishly. "Just the minute you give me that two hundred and ten dollars, I'm away."

Big Tam pulled a roll of money from his pocket and started to peel it.

"This is the twenty-eighth of January, Bob," he growled laconically. "A year from this date at—" he glanced up at the big office clock—"at six minutes after ten in the morning, I will be sitting here in this office waiting for you."

Bob jammed the two hundred and ten dollars down into his pocket.

"This is the twenty-eighth of January, dad," he retorted resentfully. "One year from this date at six minutes after ten in the morning, I will be right here in this office. You said you took twenty-eight thousand dollars off that Weewasson Lake section. Very well. I will take off twice that much—in all fifty-six thousand dollars. And if I fail, I'll climb up on that stool in there and—and get off it for my meals."

Then when he reached the door, Big Tam stopped him.

"When you come back, Bob, bring a cushion with you," he advised sarcastically. "Those stools get —— hard after you've sat on them for a few years."

Bob slammed the door without replying. Big Tam grabbed the telephone-receiver off the hook and called a number. A few minutes later when Bob left the building, a Burnham detective crossed the street and fell in behind him.

IV

WHEN Bob Houston told Pop Sharp how his plan had gone "agley," Pop laughed. Having no son of his own, Pop Sharp had been a second father to Bob; in fact Bob had gone to him with his troubles more often than to his father. And now that Bob had reached his twenty-first birthday, Pop would have bet his life on him. He had agreed to keep quiet about the copper find till Bob could put his plan into operation, and had hoped that he would get away with it.

Pop didn't approve of office-stools and pencils for broad shoulders and big fists. Still, though the plan was wrecked as far as the Pie River project was concerned, Bob had succeeded in getting away from that office-stool for a year at least. Anything might happen in three hundred and sixty-five days.

"Couldn't put anything over on the old man, could you, Bob?" Pop chuckled. "And he gave you the Weewasson Lake section? Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the joke?" Bob frowned. "Not even a rabbit in it, I suppose?"

"No, no, Bob; it's not that. Fact is there's more game around that lake than anywhere else for a hundred miles. That's just it. Rabbits and foxes and deer—and rocks and brush and water. That's all." And he laughed again.

"You see, Bob—" he leaned forward and tapped Bob's knee—"all that game's in there because there ain't nothing in there for a white man to go in there for. And the Indians and breeds are afraid of it."

"Afraid?" Bob's eyebrows lifted in surprise.

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"Yep. From what I could find out twenty-five years ago when we cut the timber in there, that height of land through that section used to be a kind of boundary line between the Crees around Hudson Bay, and the Algonquins of the St. Lawrence Valley. And to keep the scrapping Algonquins south of it in their own territory, the Crees made up a lot of ghost-stories about it. The Indians are great believers in ghosts and spirits and such things, Bob. And one of their tales was about a woman.

"They claimed that every night in the Summer, a half-breed squaw waded down a creek with a bundle of sticks on her head and disappeared at the top of the falls where the creek tumbled into the lake. She wasn't supposed to go over the falls—just faded away where the water started to bend down. But of course it was only a yarn. None of us ever saw her."

Bob laughed unbelievingly.

"You think, then, that dad thought I'd hear about those tales and get scared out?"

"No." Pop shook his head and pondered a moment. "I don't know just what he picked out that section for, but I guess it was because he knows, and everybody else knows that there ain't nothing in there but the game, and rocks and brush and water. You'll stay in there a year and come out with both hands full of nothing—just nothing."

Bob buttoned up his coat.

"Give me a description of the lake so that I can find it for myself, will you, Pop? I won't be able to afford a guide with only two hundred and ten dollars for a year's outfit. As it is, I'll have to rely on the game for the bulk of my food-supply."

Pop found a pencil and spread a piece of paper across his knee.

"It's an 'L'-shaped lake, Bob"—he drew it on the paper—"and right here in the angle is a landmark you can't miss. It's a hill that covers all of a hundred acres, and its highest peak is as bald as—as I am. That peak is about a thousand feet up in the air and there ain't as much as a handful of grass growing on it anywhere. When we cut in there, the boys used to spend Sunday trying to climb it, but no one ever made it.

"Then right here on the south side there's a cañon that cuts off the whole side of the hill. We cut some of the finest white pine in that cañon that I ever set eyes on; and there's a creek runs through it and over a falls into the lake. That's Weewasson Creek—the one the squaw is supposed to wade. And, Bob"—Pop grinned—"if you drop a line just below the falls about midnight, you'll get some of the finest pickerel that you ever saw.

"Now, Bob, you can't miss the lake if you keep your eye peeled for the bald peak of that big hill. When were you thinking of going up?"

Bob pulled on his gloves.

"Just the minute I can buy my outfit." And he bade Pop good-by.

Then when he was gone—

"There might be something back of that yarn, at that." Pop was talking to himself. "It stands to reason that that's one tale the Crees wouldn't have made up just to scare the Algonquins—because a squaw wading down a creek with a bundle of sticks on her head ain't nothing to be afraid of. H-m-m-m. Now I wonder if there's any connection between that yarn and the tale of the little French breed that used to bring the gold into Fort Abitibi? What was that tale anyway? I'll have to find out."

And an hour later when Pop Sharp boarded a car for down-town, a Burnham detective left a doorway further down the street and caught the next car. Big Tam Houston had been very busy for the week that he had kept Bob waiting for his answer.

V

BOB HOUSTON rolled out of his blankets and flailed his arms to restore circulation. Bob was beginning the first day of his proposed year at Weewasson Lake.

The evening before when Bob arrived with his third and last load of outfit, the sun had been down an hour; and being very tired with the long haul on snow-shoes, he had pitched his tent and rolled up in his blankets. But he hadn't slept. In spite of the snow piled against the canvas inside and out, and his three heavy blankets, the fifty degrees of frost in the twenty-mile gale had laughed at him. A weakling would have gone to sleep—till eternity. But Bob's physical perfection was too well nourished.

For a full five minutes, till his teeth stopped chattering, Bob flailed his arms and stamped his feet. He'd have to find a more

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sheltered spot for his tent and get his supplies under cover. He stepped out of the tent and turned his back to the wind.

Above him in the gray of the dawn, the thousand-foot bald peak of the big hill pointed like a finger at the fading stars. On the left the snow-buried earth dropped sharply into the creek cañon. Below, the long reaches of wind-swept ice sealed up the black waters of Weewasson Lake. Bob decided on the cañon—he would be out of the wind down there—and buckled on his snow-shoes. And an hour later he found what he wanted.

At the foot of the falls a huge boulder had thundered down from the overhanging cliff above and lodged in an angle of the sheer rock wall. Beneath it as it lay, yawned a pocket large enough to house a dozen men. He had but to fold double his twelve-foot wall-tent, hang it over the entrance and build a fire inside; the smoke would find its way out through the crevices along the cañon wall.

Bob struck his tent and moved. Nightfall found him grinning over his pipe beside a roaring fire in his "castle," as he called it. For the eight weeks till Spring, the frost and the snow were going to be trifles to laugh at. And then—then it suddenly came to him that that frost-bound waterfall just outside his castle door, was the falls that the woman waded to with the bundle of sticks on her head.

Bob laughed. Bob did his own thinking, and he wasn't an Indian.

DOWN in Toronto that same day, Pop Sharp gave in his resignation. Pop found that he needed all his time to look after his copper interests on the Pie River. When he walked into Big Tam Houston's office, Big Tam was penning a letter. He didn't look up.

"I've got to leave you, Tam," Pop announced hurriedly. "It's kind of hard after working for you for thirty years, but I've got another job that will pay me more than I'm worth to you."

Big Tam jabbed his pen into the ink.

"All right," he growled. "The cashier out there will settle with you."

Pop turned to leave the office. Then he stopped; and his faded blue eyes were suspiciously moist when he retraced his steps.

"And if anything should happen to Bob, you'll let me know, Tam?"

Big Tam held his pen poised over the ink a moment.

"Yes!" he snapped finally. "But there won't be anything happen to him."

IN THAT eight weeks till Spring, Bob Houston learned many things. He had to learn many things. Though his knowledge of woodcraft was extensive, he found that to put it to practical personal use was another matter altogether. He learned to bank a fire to hold it overnight, how to set a trap that would catch at least a rabbit, and to allow for the distance a deer would travel while his rifle bullet was leaping the intervening gap. Experience taught him that frost bites without advertising its teeth, and that the skin all peeled off his nose if he thawed it out over the fire.

And then when the snow had gone and he had covered with both feet every square mile of his territory, he learned that his father and Pop Sharp had not been mistaken. Apart from the game, there was nothing to be found in that section but rocks and brush and water.

Yet if he had gone just a mile west of his five-mile limit he would have found another camp—the camp of a Burnham detective.

Bob was sitting on a rock at the crest of the falls on the first day of May smoking his after-dinner pipe. He had come in on the twentieth of February, and in all that ten weeks he had seen just one human face—his own when he shaved. Pop Sharp had told him that he would never see a soul in there, and that meant—that meant—Bob scrambled to his feet.

Five hundred yards up the cañon, standing in the creek, was a man!

VI

BOB was lonesome. Inside of five minutes he had covered four hundred and fifty of that five hundred yards of rocks and brush. Then he caught a glimpse of a heavy revolver at the newcomer's belt and stopped abruptly. Bob had discarded boots for moccasins, as more sure-footed on the rocks, and the stranger had not heard him coming. Bob decided to make his presence known before he went any further.

"Hello, pal!" he called.

The newcomer's hand leaped to his

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revolver. He whirled around and waded swiftly to the bank.

Bob dropped his pipe.

"Suffering cats!" he gasped. "He's a woman!"

Silence. For a moment the creek rippled noisefully by. Then Bob started up toward her.

Of average height, the woman looked shorter in her male attire of coarse khaki and high gum boots. Her fully developed figure gave the lie to her seventeen-year-young features. Her hair, loosely coiled beneath a faded gray fedora, was brown—that brown that seems to catch and return every stray ray of the sunlight. And her arms, bare to the elbows, were tanned to match the outdoor color of her face and neck. And when Bob stopped within three feet of her—

"Where—where did you come from?" she gasped.

Unbelievingly, Bob stared. Slowly a broad grin crossed his face.

"Down there," his hand pointed downstream. "I've a castle at the falls. Where did you come from?"

"Up there," she pointed the other way. "I've a pine-tree on a hill eight miles away. What's your name?"

"Si Perkins. What's yours?"

"Sis Hopkins."

And then as their right hands reached out to meet and acknowledge that burlesque introduction, two hearty peals of laughter echoed down the cañon.

Bob Houston and Jean MacLean had met before.

The Summer before, in Toronto, Bob Houston had been introduced to Jean MacLean at a frat ball at Haverges Ladies' College. Many times after that they had met at the football games in the Fall, and at skating parties in High Park in December. And, though they invariably paired off when the parties broke up, they had never given each other a serious thought. They were "one of the girls," and "one of the boys," that was all. But now—it was May-day.

Bob dropped Jean's hand and gripped her two shoulders. He demanded—

"What are you doing here, Jean MacLean?"

Jean's smile faded out.

"My home was up here, Bob, in Barraute, till—till father died."

Bob suddenly remembered his hat and shook it off.

"But this—those clothes?"

Her smile started back.

"I've got to earn my own living now, Bob, and—and they're handier to wade in the water with than skirts. I've—" she hesitated and sat down on a big boulder behind her.

"Sit down, Bob, and I'll tell you about it."

And then when Bob had stretched his full length on the sand at her feet—

"Father was one of the old-time trappers, Bob," she began. "He didn't know anything else. His father was the chief trader at Fort Abitibi when he was born, and Fort Abitibi was not a depot; so he and his father were the only two white people there. Father's mother died when he was too young to remember her, and he grew up much the same as an Indian's child. In fact, when he was fifteen he could blaze a trap-line, stay out all Winter and come into the post in March with as big a bundle of furs as any redskin. And, Bob—" she glanced down at her khaki trousers and big boots—"I was born and raised in the big woods, too. I never saw a railroad till I was twelve. Then mother died and we moved to Barraute. That was so I could go to school.

"Father had made up his mind that I was to get an education—something he had never been able to obtain. That was his only incentive after mother died, and every move he made had that end in view. In the Summer while I was at school, he would pack his canoe and go hunting for Weewasson's gold. In the Fall he would pack his traps and we would go back into the woods.

"He took me along to help him. I did the cooking, and helped him with the skinning and stretching. And I was some one to talk to, Bob. It nearly broke him when mother died. He often told me that he would have gone insane, out there on the trap-line with just his thoughts, if I hadn't been waiting for him when he came back to the cabin.

"Then one day he came in with a black fox.

"'Look, Jean!' he laughed like a little boy with a new toy. 'Ain't he a beauty? He's worth five hundred, Jean. If I could get a few like him, Weewasson could keep his gold.'

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"And the next week he got two more. There must have been three in the one litter, he said. That was three years ago, Bob, and the fourteen hundred dollars he made them pay for those three skins sent me to Haverges. I was in my second year when I met you.

"And then last Christmas I came home—just in time to say good-by. Now—" she pointed down to her big gum boots—"now I've got to earn my own living. And I'd sooner look for Weewasson's gold than work in the city."

Bob felt for his pipe and remembered that he had dropped it down the creek.

"Weewasson's gold," he laughed. "I heard that tale at Englehart when I came in, but I didn't believe it. So you think there might have been some truth in it?"

Jean smiled.

"I know there is, Bob. Father remembered the little breed; remembered him coming into the post, saw his gold often. And, Bob, I've found it."

VII

"WHAT?" Bob scrambled to his feet.

Jean waded out into the creek and came back with a gallon milk-pan.

"I've washed nearly all the sand out of that panful," she explained, "and you can see for yourself."

Bob rubbed his left eye. Then he changed the pan over into his left hand and rubbed his right eye. Then he sat down and scratched his head.

Scattered through the double handful of black sand in the bottom of the pan were a dozen yellow nuggets, and hundreds of tiny flakes of raw gold. There was all of a hundred and fifty dollars in that one pan.

"Where on earth did you get this?" Bob demanded. "Not out there in the creek?"

"Yes," Jean answered. "Father's father said that Weewasson's gold came out of matrix of gravel, but—well, there it is out there in the sand."

Bob dropped the pan on the big boulder and waded out into the stream. The water was very variable in depth at that point, and a sand-bar ran down the center of the creek but a few inches beneath the surface. And in the sunlight the metal was very conspicuous in the black sand.

Bob waded up to the upper end of the sand-bar, turned and came back to the down-stream end. Several times he lifted handfuls of the sand and allowed it to run through his fingers. Then he went back to the bank and examined carefully the rock formation of the overhanging wall of the cañon. Finally he came back to Jean.

"Young woman," he announced grimly, "you're the luckiest person in the world. Of the scores that must have searched this vicinity for Weewasson's gold, you alone could see it out there. And—and I'm going to start right in and help you clean up that sand-bar."

"No, you are not!" Jean declared emphatically. "That find is mine—all mine!"

"Of course it is!" Bob's eyebrows raised in surprise. "You didn't imagine, did you, that I would take any of it?"

"And you didn't imagine, did you," she retorted laughingly, "that I would let you work for nothing?"

"It wouldn't be work to work for you, Jean."

For a moment Jean eyed him. Then she shook her head very decidedly.

"You'll at least allow me to build you a sluice?" Bob insisted.

"No."

"All right," Bob grinned. "If you're going to be a pig-headed Scotty, I can't stop you. But you're framing up some job for yourself, if you've made up your mind to clean up that sand-bar with that silly little pan."

"That's my business!" shortly.

"Very well." Bob's face was grave. "My business will be to sit here on the bank while you are working, and keep the rabbits and chipmunks from attacking you."

"You'll do no such thing!" angrily.

For answer, Bob sat down on the sand, leaned his back against the boulder and felt for his watch.

"It is now three o'clock," he announced shortly. "You can knock off at five."

"O-h-h-h?" sarcastically.

Without another word, Jean picked up her pan, and with her big gum boots flapping noisily against her khaki trousers, strode up the bank of the creek.

Bob didn't try to stop her. Being Scotch himself, he understood the Scotch antagonistic temperament. He knew that the following morning would see her back on the sand-bar with her pan. And he would

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be right there sitting on the bank as long as she stood there in the creek. Bob, too, was characteristically Scotch.

When Jean was out of sight up the cañon, Bob got up on his feet and started down toward his castle.

" 'S funny!" he ejaculated aloud. "Her father's father said that Weewasson's gold came out of a matrix of gravel, and that gold out there in the sand has never been water-washed. And it's all on top. And yesterday when I whipped this creek for trout, I stood right on that sand-bar for a good twenty minutes, and it wasn't there then!"

That night the Burnham detective packed his tent six miles to the west, mounted his horse and started for Englehart. And when he reported to Big Tam Houston two days later, Big Tam paid him off—a week too soon.

VIII

BOB HOUSTON was right. The next morning found Jean MacLean back on the sand-bar with her pan. And she had moved her camp. A hundred yards up the cañon, the smoke from her breakfast fire still rose in little white spirals against the cañon wall. But she didn't look up when Bob arrived at the big boulder opposite.

"Good morning, old prospector," Bob greeted. "How are you fixed for tobacco?"

No answer.

"Did the howling of the wolves keep you awake last night?"

Jean dipped into the water for another panful of sand.

"Look out!" he yelled sharply. "There's snakes in that creek!"

"Oh!"

Jean dropped her pan and started for the bank. Then when he laughed, she stopped, sneered and went back. But the deed was done. The dark current swirling past her was too much for her startled nerves. She waded ashore.

"Bob Houston," she cried angrily, "you're not a man."

He glanced down at her khaki trousers and big gum boots and fumbled with his suspender.

"You haven't such a thing as a spare button, have you?" he grinned. "I lost my last one this morning."

That finished it.

With her head held scornfully high she waded back out to the sand-bar and picked up her pan. After that, no matter what he did, he couldn't startle her again.

All morning Bob sat with his back to the boulder, keeping up an endless dialogue with himself about frogs and snakes, and cold, clammy fish with a prodigious appetite for rubber boots and a nasty habit of wiggling under one's toes. Yet she never wavered. Nor would she speak to him again.

Even at midday when she waded ashore and started up to her camp, she passed him without a word. And when he got up to go down for dinner, the fact that she wouldn't under any circumstance allow him to help her was fully established in his mind. Yet he kept at it. Bob was no quitter. The afternoon found him back at the boulder.

For five days Bob sat on the bank, telling her tales of sand-worms and water-rats and little green crabs, or drawling fustian advice in broad Scotch dialect; and then toward evening climaxing it all with an hour's silence, followed by a sudden unearthly yell.

But Jean was no quitter either. Jean had been born and raised where the plural of "nerve" is unknown. After that first unexpected fright she was immune. With never a hint that she was aware of his presence, she stood all day in the swirling current and washed the gold from the sand-bar. It took her six days. She finished on the morning of the seventh of May.

The morning of the seventh of May, Bob climbed the natural stairway beside the falls and stopped to light his pipe. Up the cañon, Jean worked at the upper end of the sand-bar, nearly finished. Noon at the latest would see her leaving the creek; mid-afternoon she would pack up and move out. And he wasn't going to allow her to leave bad friends with him. He had promised himself at breakfast that the moment he reached the boulder opposite her, he would wade right out and apologize. She was going away. . . Going away? Jean was going away! Bob turned around.

Stretching away for three miles into the hills the lake rippled in the morning sunlight—deserted. Above him the frowning face of the cañon wall shot straight up a hundred ragged feet. Below, the thousand-ton boulder that formed his castle leaned against the wall, for all the world like a . . . Bob scratched his head.

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Before he left his fire under the boulder he had laid a big green log on it to hold it till dinner-time. Yet no smoke drifted up from the top of the boulder. And then it suddenly dawned on him that he never had seen any smoke above that boulder. Scores and scores of times he had left a big fire burning in his castle and climbed to the crest of the falls, but never once could he remember having seen any smoke outside.

Looking back now he realized that it had been the non-existence of smoke that had failed to attract his attention. Inside, under the boulder, the smoke fairly leaped into the crevices along the face of the rock wall. Yet outside there wasn't even a gray wisp.

Bob climbed back down and drew aside his canvas door. The fire was blazing viciously and the black smoke from the green log poured into the crevices at the top. He stepped back a few yards. There wasn't a sign of smoke above the boulder. He investigated.

Pulling his hat down tight, Bob climbed to the top of the big boulder and worked his way across to the cañon wall. And then the secret of the phenomenon was a secret no longer.

The thousand-ton boulder had once been a part of the overhanging cliff above. Frost had split it off. When it fell it had landed on its large end in the angle, balanced upright and toppled over against the cañon wall. And in that angle there had been a hole in the wall, the entrance to a cave, probably. Now, the top of the leaning boulder blocked the hole. Except for a crack at the top, a foot long and two inches wide, the hole was not visible.

Bob lit a match and held it down to the crack. The tiny flame sucked in and went out. Under the boulder the smoke from his fire was pouring through the crevices into the crack—but where was the final outlet?

Bob turned around. Two hundred yards out into the lake the big hill ended in a bald bluff. Below him, three feet from the bottom of the boulder, the troubled waters at the foot of the falls lapped at the sloping rock. Above, the thousand-foot bald peak rose sheer. But there wasn't a sign of smoke.

And then as he climbed down, sprang into his memory the tale of Weewasson's gold.

IX

BOB jumped. With one jerk he wrenched away the canvas door of his castle. In ten minutes he had carried out everything he owned and piled it behind the rocks fifty feet away. A half hour later he had emptied the powder out of two boxes of shotgun cartridges into a tomato-can. Then he jammed the can into one of the crevices where the smoke from his fire had found egress. A cedar branch became a fuse. With the tufted tip of it touching the bottom of the powder can, and a pile of live coals at its base, Bob left it and dodged behind the rocks.

The flames took hold of the pitchy bark of the cedar pole. Gathering speed as they climbed, they leaped from branch to branch. The tufted tip caught, flared. A roar echoed out across the cañon! The leaning boulder sprang erect, balanced. Then with a rasping grind it overbalanced and toppled into the water.

Five feet up in the cañon wall yawned the black mouth of a cave.

Bob left the rocks. At his feet where the big boulder had rested, the splintered, almost indestructible roots of a white pine stump grew down into a crack in the rock. Before the boulder crashed down on it that stump had been a fine big white-pine tree. And the thick branches of it must have completely hidden the mouth of the cave.

Bob was nearly six feet tall. His chin came just above the bottom of the hole in the wall. For a moment he blinked to accustom his eyes to the semidarkness of the cave. Then with a gasp he stepped back and found a seat on a rock. Twenty feet from the mouth of the cave inside lay two moldy human skulls!

Bob's half-formed theory was fast becoming a fact. In his mind's eye he reproduced a scene that was sixty years into the past. He could see the little French breed rounding the bluff out there in the lake. He could see him paddle in, and tie his canoe behind that outflung veil of the falls. He could see him watching his trailers through the thick branches of the white-pine tree that hid him. From the lake, not even an Indian would imagine there was room for a landing at the foot of that sheer rock wall. And then when the chance of discovery was past, the little breed had tossed his supplies up into the mouth of the cave to—Bob

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nodded his head—to his squaw. And at night the little breed's squaw had climbed to the cañon above for their firewood and brought her bundle of sticks back on her head.

Then one Winter's day the thousand-ton boulder had come crashing down and sealed them up in the cave.

Bob got up on his feet. No wonder the little breed had stopped coming into the post with his gold—Bob felt for a match to light his pipe—he and his squaw had slowly starved to death there in their—in their—Bob's hand closed on his watch—in their gold-mine!

Bob stepped swiftly to the mouth of the cave. He put up his hands to climb into it, and became aware of the fact that his right hand held his watch. He hesitated and glanced at the time. Ten-thirty.

For one long minute Bob stood wavering.

UP IN the cañon on the sand-bar in the creek, Jean MacLean scraped up the last of the sand that showed color and glanced down to the falls. A half hour had passed since the roar of an explosion echoed up from the falls and Bob had not come. What had happened? Had Bob . . . She whirled abruptly and faced up-stream.

Bob arrived at the boulder opposite and strode straight out through the water to the sand-bar. Without a word he wrapped his arms around Jean, lifted her bodily and waded ashore.

Till he stepped up on the bank, Jean didn't speak. Nor did she make an effort to free herself. The rocky bottom of the creek made treacherous footing and she had no desire for a full-dress bath. But when he arrived at the boulder she demanded sharply that he remove his arm from around her immediately.

"You're just a primeval brute, Bob Houston!" she flared. "Put me down at once!"

Bob looked down into the flushed face against his shoulder and shook his head.

"No, Jean," he remonstrated firmly, "this foolishness has got to end now. This is the first serious difference between us, little woman, and I want you to help me make it the last. Don't you think, Jean, that—that—" he groped frantically for words that would not come. Then—

"Jean, I love you," he finished lamely.

The flushed face against his shoulder lost much of its color. The angry features slowly framed a smile.

"And yet," she pouted, "you let me stand out there in that cold water and do all that work myself!"

Bob gasped.

X

POP SHARP closed the office-door behind him and dropped into the visitor's chair by the desk. Big Tam had sent for him, had merely said "Come." For what?

"Pop." Big Tam swung his chair around and faced his old employee. "You and I have known each other for thirty years."

"Thirty-one years," Pop corrected.

"And all that time you've been working for me." Big Tam ignored the interruption. "Even in the idle Summer months when I had nothing for you that you could do, I paid you your salary. Why? I'll tell you why, Pop. You were one of the three. I was —— sorry for you, Pop. And I swore that as long as you cared, you would work for me. We three played fair in those days, didn't we? And I've played fair for twenty-five years with you. That's right, isn't it?"

"Yes, Tam," Pop nodded slowly. "I've never found a thing to complain about."

"Well then!" Big Tam's heavy fist crashed down on the desk. "Why can't you play fair with me?"

Pop got up and crossed the office, turned and came back.

"—— it, Tam!" he snorted angrily, "that lad was never born to push a pencil! A steam-heated office would kill him in a year. And, Tam—if you had left him alone, he would have bought you out in five years. That claim he staked on the Pie River is the best of our two, and already I've realized seventy-five——"

Big Tam interrupted him.

"I know all about that, Pop," he growled. "I got wise to that Pie River claim of his a week after you gave in your resignation. But he's lost that. He wasn't quite of age when he registered it, and it belongs to me now. But that's not what I'm talking about. What I want to know is what the devil business you've got butting into my affairs? What business you had trying to help Bob win his bet with me? What business you had salting Weewasson Creek with California gold right in front of

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Bob's camp where he couldn't miss it?"

Pop's mouth sprang open in surprise. He shook his bald, bald head.

"You've guessed wrong this time, Tam," he grinned. "We three played square twenty-five years ago. And I've played square ever since with you."

And he whirled abruptly and strode out of the office.

BOB HOUSTON slipped a handful of candles into his pocket and gave one to Jean. Then when he had climbed up into the cave, and before he pulled her up beside him, he warned her of the skulls.

"I'm not afraid of them, Bob," Jean smiled. "I found several Indian skulls in the woods when I was a little girl."

But she shuddered perceptibly when she saw them.

"Starved to death, Bob?" she whispered gently. "That must be a horrible way to die?"

He drew her away.

"We'll give them a Christian burial this afternoon, but now—" and he lit their candles.

Holding his candle above his head, Bob learned from the smooth surface of the ceiling of the cave the history of its making. In prehistoric days when the creek had been a cañonful of seething flood, the water had carved away the soft spots in the rock. And this had been one of the soft spots. How far back into the hill it extended was left to the wildest conjecture; the candle flames spluttered and flared in the strong draft. As they advanced slowly into the black depths of it, the cave began to show signs of once having been a human habitation.

Against the left wall the skulls and horn-spreads of dozens of deer lay in a heap of ash-like dust. The floor was littered with branches and chips of wood, dry-rotted in the continual draft. Farther on in a narrow passage the head of an ax, almost rusted away, stood holding its crumbling haft against the rock. And over everything lay a black mantle of soot—from the smoke of Bob's camp-fire under the big boulder at the mouth of the cave.

Slowly, carefully they advanced. One hundred, two hundred yards through the tunnel-like cave they made their cautious way. And then, suddenly, the flames of their candles stopped flaring. The strong draft no longer fanned them. And holding their candles aloft, Bob and Jean discovered that the low ceiling had disappeared.

With a little cry Jean raised her hand, pointing.

"Look!" she gasped.

A thousand feet above them gleamed a long strip of the blue sky.

Bob snapped his fingers.

"That's it!" he ejaculated. "That's the chimney! No wonder I couldn't find any smoke! By the time it got up there, it wasn't smoke that anybody could see."

And then—then as they stared, at the end of the strip of blue sky the sun edged over.

Bob felt for his watch.

"The bald peak of the hill!" he whispered. "And it's twelve o'clock!"

XI

FIVE minutes later the sunlight, pouring through the fissure in a long ribbon and playing on the clouds of dust their feet had raised, turned the night of the cave into a golden dawn. For a half hour, till the sun had traveled the length of the strip of sky above and passed on, they would need no artificial light. They blew out their candles.

The cave proper where they now stood was nothing more than a mighty crack in the heart of the hill. To the right and left and above them it narrowed to nothing—a mere ragged line in the distance. From wall to wall at its greatest width was probably ninety feet—Bob counted twenty paces and guessed the rest. They could go no farther. At their feet, down, down into the solid rock the crack extended. And when Jean dropped a pebble it splashed, and the light reflected back from a million ripples.

Bob picked up another pebble.

"This cave here is a fault, Jean," he explained. "And it slopes down under the lake. That water is the lake backing up—" He stopped abruptly.

For a moment he weighed the pebble in his hand. Then he rubbed it frantically on his sleeve. Finally he held it out at arm's length where the light was stronger.

"Look at that, Jean!" he chuckled excitedly. "And I was going to throw it away!"

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Free of dirt, the pebble was a dull yellow!

Ten minutes later they found Weewasson's gold.

In an angle in the wall of the fault, to the left of the tunnel they had come through, they found the remains of a bundle of blankets, and a pile of ashes. And back in one corner, a half hundred little piles of green mold split open at a kick, to spill from their rotten coverings a stream of raw gold.

Bob's two hands closed on Jean's two shoulders.

"Little woman," he declared, "we'll be married on—on the tenth."

Jean's two hands came up and tried to cover the two big hands on her shoulders.

"Yes—Bob."

"And we'll spend our honeymoon—where?"

A grin crept into Jean's face.

"My mother came frae Glaskee, Bob."

Bob laughed.

" 'Tis Glaskee then, lass?"

"Aye."

XII

IT WAS January the twenty-eighth on the little calendar on Big Tam Houston's desk. Up on the wall the big clock said six minutes after ten. In the swivel chair Big Tam leaned back and concluded a half hour's narrative conversation with:

"That was the plan, Pop. You never saw me do anything without a definite reason behind it, did you? Well, then, you can have some idea of the slap in the face it meant to me when Bob refused to take the stool. I tell you, Pop, the young folks of——"

The office-door swung open. Bob Houston and his wife walked in and glanced up at the clock. They were a half minute late.

Bob nodded to Pop and crossed to the desk.

"Dad," he grinned, "shake hands with my wife—formerly a Miss Jean MacLean—Jean, my father."

Big Tam closed his huge fist over Jean's hand and shook it warmly. Then while he was placing two more chairs near the desk Bob made Jean acquainted with Pop Sharp, and everybody took their seats.

Big Tam plunged straight into the business in hand.

"You brought that cushion, Bob?" he growled.

"No." Bob felt in his breast-pocket. "The cushion is in the bank. Here's the receipt." He laid a bank-book on the desk.

Big Tam shook his head.

"Won't do, Bob," he rasped. "Every cent's worth of gold that you took out of Weewasson Creek belongs to Pop there. He dumped it in there on the last night in April."

Bob nudged Jean's arm and turned to Pop.

"Is that right, Pop?"

"Yes," came the answer. "On the last night in April I salted a sand-bar about five hundred yards above the falls. But I didn't put it there for you, Bob. I searched half the night for your camp and came to the conclusion that you had got disgusted and left the lake."

Bob smiled. His camp had been below the falls under the boulder, and as there was no smoke to betray its presence, he knew how Pop had missed it.

"But I didn't get your gold, Pop," he shook his head. "My wife found it."

"But—but—" Big Tam stammered, "the detective I sent up there says he saw a man washing it out with a pan the very next day?"

Bob chuckled, and before Jean could stop him:

"It was all a matter of clothes, dad," he explained. "I, too, thought she was a man till she turned around and I saw her face."

"But this—" Big Tam opened the bank-book. Then he whistled.

"One hundred and sixty-eight thousand dollars!" he gasped. "Bob, where did you get this?"

"Where you missed it, dad," Bob grinned. "I found Weewasson's gold."

"What?" Big Tam sat up straight in his chair.

And then, while the two men who had been all over the Weewasson Lake section personally, listened in a breathless silence, Bob recounted how he had found the cave, and the little bags of gold.

"And the source of it," he concluded. "We found that soon after. For seven years the little French breed and his squaw had been working the gold out of the apex of a stray seam of gravel in the wall of the fault. When the big boulder sealed them up they had nearly cleaned it out. I searched for the body of the seam in the other wall, but the fault slopes down with a

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displacement of sixty feet. That means that the body of that seam is all of twenty yards under water. Some day, if the lake ever dries up—" And he shrugged his shoulders.

XIII

BIG Tam got up and crossed to the window. And as he stood there with his back to them, Bob noticed for the first time that his father was getting very gray-haired and round-shouldered. He jumped to his feet and took one step toward him, but Pop stopped him.

"Sit down, Bob," Pop commanded gently. "I've got something to tell you now."

And then when Bob had resumed his seat—

"Bob," he frowned, "I'm kind of ashamed of you."

He stopped and pondered a moment, and then as though he felt that he had made a bad start he began again in a lower tone of voice.

"You're married now, Bob, so there's no harm in telling you that your father wanted to keep you here, not only to take his place when he gave up business, but because he had picked out a young woman that he very much wanted you to marry."

Bob's antagonistic jaw set itself. Jean fidgeted in her seat. But as neither spoke, Pop went on.

"Twenty-five years ago, Bob, there were three of us fell desperately in love with the same little woman. She meant everything to each of us. And when I say that she meant everything to each of us, I mean just that, Bob. But we fought fair. No one of us ever thought of taking any unfair advantage of either of the other two. We all left it to her. And—and your father and I—lost."

Pop stopped and picked at the corner of the desk blotter. Then he straightened up.

"There never was another woman for me, Bob. I'll die single. But your father was a different kind of a man. He wanted a home and children of his own. So he married your mother. And then when you came, and your mother died, he started to plan for you. One of his plans was to build up a good business for you to step into when you could handle it. The other plan—" Pop glanced across to Big Tam by the window.

"Well, Bob, neither your father nor I ever lost track of the little woman we had lost. She didn't live a great while after she was married, but she was quite happy and contented. And when her little girl was born—Bob, your father swore that that little daughter of his old sweetheart was the only little girl in the world good enough for you. So you know now just what it cost him when you upset all his plans. You know now——"

It was Jean who interrupted him.

White-faced and strangely silent, Jean arose, crossed the office and laid her hand on Big Tam's shoulder.

"Mr. Houston," she whispered, and her voice was barely audible, "who was that little girl that you picked out for Bob?"

Big Tam's two huge hands came up and cupped Jean's face.

"Yes, Jean MacLean," he answered, "that girl was you."

Over at the desk, Bob Houston bounced out of his chair. And the look on his face sent Pop Sharp into roars of laughter.

"But—but—" Bob stammered.

"Buts nothing!" Pop chuckled. "You wouldn't stay here in Toronto where she was going to school. So when your father found out that her father was dead, and that she was just as pig-headed as you were—wouldn't go to work in anybody's office and had made up her mind that just as soon as Spring came she was going to get out and hunt for Weewasson's gold—why he sends you up to her. No, Bob, you can't put anything over on the old-timers."

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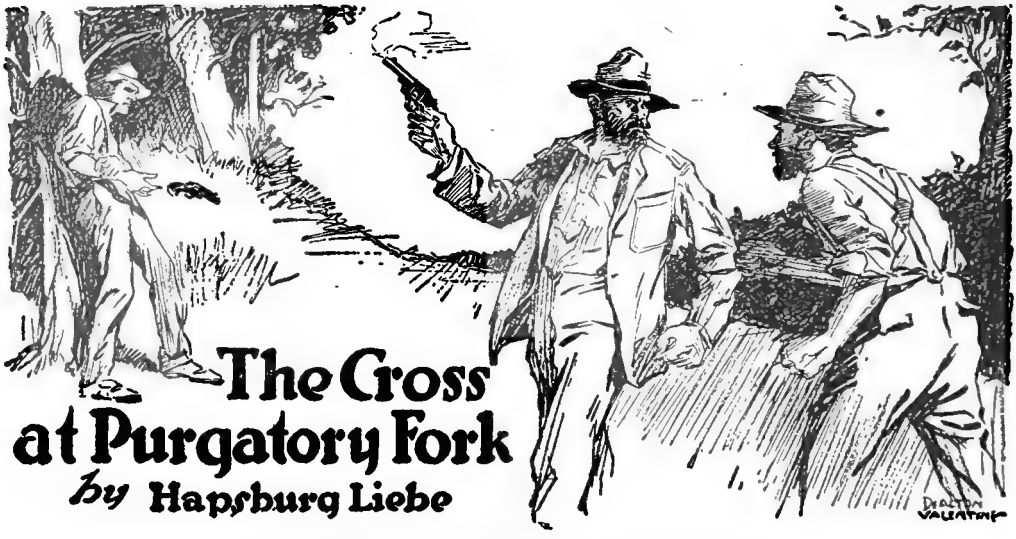

The Cross at Purgatory Fork

by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "The Man-Breaker," "When Old Glory Called," etc.

WHEN one of the Capertons was elected high sheriff by a big majority and given charge of the Gladesville jail and its prisoner, he at once committed an indiscretion. He laughingly remarked that the Lundys of the neighboring section would have to keep as quiet as sick mice when they were in his town, or else keep out of that town altogether.

His words traveled—and, unfortunately, without the laugh that should have accompanied them—twenty-five miles before another sunrise; they went by that strange wireless they have always had in Tennessee's back o' beyond. Gladesville is in the foothills of the Unakas; and it is a notably healthful place, now that the Lundys and the Capertons have ceased to pay their respects in lead.

The Lundys, of course, looked upon the sheriff's remark as an unwarranted insult; and there was one of them who immediately decided to call the sheriff's hand, so to speak. This Lundy was a big young fellow, and a timberjack, and he had first seen day's light in a cabin on a little backwoods river called Big Creek.

When the disquieting news reached him, "Big Creek" Lundy was timberjacking and fighting all comers at a logging-camp situated just below where Crooked Creek flows into Purgatory Fork. Lundy borrowed a horse, rode into the town of the Capertons, and proved his manhood and his very excellent marksmanship by shooting up things in general without drawing a single drop of blood; and he did it without being hurt himself!

He was gone in a cloud of dust when Sheriff Tom Caperton came to his senses. Caperton tore at his beard—he was only twenty-eight, and still unmarried, but he wore a full beard—and invoked every one of Heaven's most virile curses on the heads of every one of the Lundys. But that availed him less than nothing. The townspeople, even his kinsmen and their sympathizers, were soon laughing at him openly.

Then the disgruntled officer tried to salve his wounded honor by going before a magistrate and there taking a solemn oath that he would bring about the arrest of Big Creek Lundy if it cost him his life.

The man who thus publicly defied Tom Caperton not only left the county—he left the State; and he did not come back across its border until he had grown a beard quite as full and as silky as the beard of the high sheriff. Perhaps he would not have come back even then, had it not been for his sweetheart, old Peter Garlin's daughter Bess, the belle of her section.

He reached the Purgatory Fork camp a little before sundown of a warm July day, when the loggers were coming in from their work in the woods. Most of the bronzed faces he saw were to him new faces; timberjacks, as a rule, do not spend years in one outfit. But those men whom he knew, he

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was glad to note, didn't recognize him; his beard was what he had hoped it would be, a perfect disguise. He wondered what the girl would think of it!

The camp's superintendent was a new man; he was tall and sallow, and his eyes were a little more than shrewd. He seemed pleased when Lundy walked into his office-bedroom in the down-stairs of the big, rough boarding-house and asked to be taken on as a cutter.

"What's your name?" he inquired.

"You can put me down as Jack Jackson," said Lundy.

He detested an outright lie.

The other looked wise as he opened a timebook.

"All I'm after is your work, Jackson," he muttered. "I don't care anything whatever about your name. If I cared anything about names, I'd probably go distracted wondering how it comes that I've got a James K. Polk, a John L. Sullivan, and a Bill Cody here working for me. Supper's ready, I guess. The boys will show you a vacant bunk. Look out for Joab Redford. Good-by."

"Who's Joab Redford?"

"You'll know soon enough. I'm busy here."

When he had had his supper with the others, the newcomer took up his clothes bag and went to find a place in the loggers' sleeping-quarters, which occupied the whole unpartitioned up-stairs of the boarding-house. The fellow who called himself "Bill Cody" accommodatingly showed him to a vacant bed, whispered to him to look out for Joab Redford, and left him. He sat down on the bed that was now his, and began to fill his pipe.

Two minutes later, a huge black-bearded man, a man whose countenance was as savage as that of an Australian black fellow, walked struttingly over to Lundy and stood regarding him queerly, insolently.

"Well?" said Lundy, half angrily.

"Who're you? What's your name, and where are you from, and what're you doin' here?"

At that, Big Creek Lundy, champion fighter, lost his hold on himself entirely. He forgot that he had to disguise his inborn pride and his utter fearlessness, as well as his face. He forgot that to fight this man, whom he now knew for the camp's bully, would be almost the same thing as to shout his identity boldly. For in those hills there was no other man who could put up the fight that Big Creek Lundy could put up.

"To all four questions," he answered hotly, "it's none of your —— business. Now get that, will you?"

The bully straightened surprisedly.

"Here, you new man," he growled, "you don't know me. I'm Jo-ab Redford. I'm hell. I eat rattlesnakes and copperheads and plate glass. I drink my water scaldin' hot, what time I ain't drinkin' bear blood and Prushic acid. When I was only five days old, I called my daddy to me and says, says I: 'Pap,' I says, 'bring me a bear and a couple o' stri-ped snakes; I'm hungry.' No—you don't know who I am."

In a flash cold wisdom returned to Lundy's brain, and he realized things. He forced himself to look deeply apologetic, and it was one of the hardest tasks he ever accomplished. The fact that a dozen or more of the loggers were looking on and listening, of course, didn't help matters any.

"Oh," he made himself to say meekly, "Oh, I didn't know you was Joab Redford. I'm down in the timebook as Jack Jackson, and I'm just from Kentucky, and I'm here to work."

Redford was bent on fighting.

"It's all a lie," he said.

Lundy sprang to his feet. He was so white that he looked cadaverous. Joab Redford took two steps backward and put up his guard; his evil black eyes were scintillating with brutish pleasure.

"Come on, Jack Jackson," he grinned.

But Lundy caught himself in time. Instead of doing that which he would have given five years of his life for the privilege of doing, he turned and walked away.

He walked across the big room, sat himself down in an open window and began to fan himself nervously with his broad-rimmed black felt hat. A few of the timberjacks made their way over to him, and he saw at once that they were inclined toward sympathizing with him. They, too, had suffered at the hands of Joab Redford.

"He's an animal," whispered "John L. Sullivan." "He ain't human. There's only one man, they say, that can thrash him; and nobody knows where that one man is. I mean Big Creek Lundy. Ever hear of him?"

"Seems to me I have," thoughtfully answered Jack Jackson. "Shot up a town and

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then cut the mustard out o' the State, didn't he?"

"That's him!" put in an old logger. "It was Gladesville, eighteen miles from here. I knowed Lundy a little. Fine, square man. Big, too; big as you, Jackson—and what a fighter! He could easy lick a ton o' wildcats in a buckthorn tree, Jackson."

It was growing dusky. Joab Redford lighted the big oil lamp that hung in the center of the room, and then strode straight to the group that stood around the new man.

"You boys talkin' about me?" he wanted to know.

BIG CREEK LUNDY gripped the windowsill tightly and forced himself to sit still. A few of the booted and corduroyed men turned away, a little more than half afraid. Suddenly a tall and lean, smooth-faced and gray-eyed man stepped squarely before Joab Redford and placed a revolver's muzzle against his stomach.

"Yes," snapped the gray-eyed man, "we were talking about you. And now let's see you help yourself!"

For a moment there was a gravelike silence. The bully turned red, and then went pale.

"You're afraid to fight me without a gun, Polk," he muttered angrily. "I'll have you arrested for carryin' that gun."

"If you think you can do it and get away with it, go ahead," very calmly.

Redford glanced to either side of him, and backed away in chagrin. He wasn't accustomed to having his bets thus raised. The man who called himself whimsically "James K. Polk" pocketed his revolver and faced the big new man.

"Do you mind a little walk with me? The moon is shining."

There was something strong and dependable and magnetic about the fellow. Lundy rose and went with him down to the clearing, and they halted beside the rippling creek. A full white moon shone from almost directly overhead, and the trees of the near-by mountainsides stood out with photographic distinctness. A small brown owl cried out weirdly, and Lundy saw his companion suppress a shudder; and by that Lundy knew that the other was not accustomed to nights in the fastnesses of the mountains.

"So your name is James K. Polk, eh?" began Lundy. "If I'd ha' known that celebrities was so much in style here, I'd ha' called myself George Washington!"

Polk laughed. "It's a polite way of saying that our names are our own affairs, isn't it? It's a common thing in the army and in logging-camps; and I've learned this about it, Jackson: I've learned that four out of five of these 'celebrities' are not really bad men. And you're no criminal, Mr. Jack Jackson; I'd nearly swear to that."

"Neither are you, Mr. President!" laughed Lundy.

For a little while they talked of Joab Redford and of the rough camp life, and grew to like each other better with each passing minute; and then Lundy lifted a big arm and pointed toward a dim light that shone from the window of a cabin down the valley.

"Who lives there?" he inquired as though carelessly.

He couldn't wait longer to learn something of his sweetheart.

"Old Pete Garlin," readily answered Polk. "Old Pete's got the finest girl you ever saw, and they're as poor as the dickens. Pete, they tell me, sold nearly everything they owned and worked himself half to death in order to educate the girl at a lowland school. But she's worth it. Such a girl! Tall, roundish, twenty-three, pretty as a rose and a dozen times as sweet as a honeysuckle; one of these girls who want to mother everything and everybody, you know. I'll admit, Jackson, that I'm in love with Bess. Though I've known her only four or five days, I really am. And, just between you and me, friend, I mean to marry her and take her out of this."

The whole of Big Creek Lundy's willpower was barely enough to prevent his betraying the feeling that filled his heart. At the first, a great wave of jealous anger for the good man at his side threatened to sweep him off his feet. Then he realized that Polk could not be blamed for caring for Bess. Any man would—at least, any man ought to—care for Bess. And human kindliness, sympathy and pity, had had a prominent place in Polk's quick love for Pete Garlin's daughter.

The two men turned toward the boarding-house. At the long porch they parted; Polk went up-stairs, and Lundy went to the near-by commissary to buy a bag of tobacco.

Less than fifteen minutes later, Big Creek Lundy was rapping lightly at the

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front door of the Garlins' cabin home. He heard the creaking of a chair, and the soft footfalls of bare feet; and then the weather-beaten door swung open, and his Bess stood before him. Beyond her, old Pete sat weaving a basket of oaken splints by the light of a few pine-knots that blazed in the wide-mouthed stone fireplace.

"Won't you come in?" the girl invited with the trustful hospitality that one meets everywhere in the mountains.

She didn't know him because of his disguising beard.

Lundy didn't speak. He walked past her and took a chair on one side of the worn stone hearth. Bess closed the door, went to the other side of the hearth and sat down; and Lundy saw, without seeming to see, that she was trying vainly to hide her pretty bare feet under the bottom of her faded and patched calico skirt.

While the two Garlins were looking speculatively at their visitor, their visitor was taking in everything with those keen eyes of his. The signs of extreme poverty that he saw all around him were enough to appal him. The Garlins had suffered dire and unusual reverses during the time that he had spent in Kentucky.

Finally he gazed straight into the soft brown eyes of his sweetheart, and drawled smilingly—

"Bess, don't you know me?"

His voice awakened things in her heart.

"Is it—Big Creek Lundy?" she asked, half with hope and half in fear.

"It's sure nobody else."

Pete Garlin dropped the basket he was weaving, smiled with real pleasure, and reached for Lundy's hand. He had always liked all the Lundys.

"Son," he said in the old hill dialect, "I hain't never doubted 'at ye'd come back here some day. But ye'll shore haf to be keerful, acause I onderstand 'at Sheriff Tom Caperton took oath to ketch ye ef it cost him his life in the doin' of it."

"I'll be careful," replied the timberjack.

He rose and went around to Bess, and pressed her hand warmly; and Bess blushed with happiness.

"So you didn't know me through my beard!" he laughed.

"Nobody would," declared the girl. "You look good with it, Big Creek; you look like I imagine the huntsman looked in a fairy story I read once. But I don't like a beard on as young a man as you. If I were you, I—I believe I'd shave it all off."

He told her why he couldn't, and she understood.

Lundy went back to his chair and sat down. The three of them talked of old times and of other things for an hour, after which Garlin yawned and rose and limped to his bed in another of the cabin's three rooms. When the door had closed behind him, his daughter bent forward and stirred the burning-pine knots that gave light; then she moved her chair a little closer to that of the man who, it seemed to her now, she had been caring for always.

"I thought you'd never come back," she murmured.

"Did you want me to come back so very bad?"

"Of course, Big Creek. You needn't have asked me that! I told you that you'd find me waiting for you when you came, no matter how long you were gone; didn't I? This is the—the happiest day I have ever known, Big Creek. For I've seen nobody else like you."

"There's lots o' better men," Lundy said feelingly.

He took both her hands and kissed them with reverence. Polk had been wholly correct in his description of her: she was every whit as pretty as a rose and a dozen times as sweet as a honeysuckle, for all her miserably poor clothing and surroundings.

In a voice that showed strain, Lundy went on:

"Bess, it looks to me like you'd just have to marry for—self-preservation, I reckon you'd call it. I want you so much that I won't ever have anybody else if I don't get you; but there's a penitentiary sentence pretty close to you and me and marriage. It wouldn't be fair for me to marry you and have that hangin' over your head all the time. Besides, Bess, I—I'm not half good enough for you."

"You *are* good enough for me!" Bess cried in low tones. "I'm not so good, though I do want to be. I'll agree with you that it looks like I'm going to have to marry to keep myself, and my father, alive. Poor old dad can't get along any more. It's not easy to sell his baskets. He's too old to work out, and he's got rheumatism. He won't let me work out; he says the Garlins never worked their womenfolk out, and he's —adamant, as books always say. I wish,

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Big Creek, that we had some near relatives.

"But I don't want to marry anybody but you," she continued, with tears in her eyes, "because I'll never love anybody else. If I must, maybe I *can* marry somebody else; but I think I'd die soon afterward. Oh, I don't know what to do! It's so hard to live like this, Doing without even decent clothing, without shoes, without so many things—even without oil for the lamp—Big Creek," in old hill dialect, "I'm a-goin' to haf to cry a little——"

ON THE following morning, Lundy was put to work at chopping trees on the other side from James K. Polk. The latter-named swung his ax strongly, but with a certain awkwardness; and this fact further proved to his cutting-mate that he was a city-bred man.

Big Creek Lundy spent a great deal of that day in trying to think of some plan by which he could render financial assistance to the Garlins without their being aware of it. He knew that to them charity was worse than poison; that their hill pride, at once the finest and the most stubborn of all pride, would never permit them to accept something for nothing. Had he not known that, he would have offered Pete Garlin money the evening before.

Another evening came, and Big Creek set himself to the task of winning the good will and confidence of the commissary clerk, and he succeeded quickly. When he left the commissary at closing-time that night, the clerk had thirty dollars of his money and orders to buy at handsome prices all the baskets old Pete Garlin could make.

The days ran on, and Bess appeared at the commissary each evening with a splint basket worth in the neighborhood of fifty cents—for which she promptly received two dollars. Soon she wore shoes and stockings, and pretty, neatly made percale dresses; and, contrary to the old adage which says that beauty unadorned is most adorned, she was doubly captivating in her new clothing. But her happiness at being temporarily relieved from the pinch of poverty may have had something to do with that sudden glorious flowering of her beauty.

The loggers hadn't seen much of her before, close as she lived to them, and now most of them tried hard to make love to her. Even Joab Redford, the unspeakable, sought to win her for his wife. He grew importunate, then insolent, and the girl became afraid of him. Then there came a day when Redford turned to find the blued muzzle of James K. Polk's revolver against his stomach, and Polk was growling into his ear:

"Bess Garlin doesn't like you, and you can't blame her; and if you annoy her any more, look out for me. You're bigger than I am, I know; but this little blue devil here in my hand makes up for the difference in our sizes. Now you remember that."

Joab Redford walked off through the laurels without replying. Something in Polk's cold gray eyes, something he had seen in that lean and smoothly shaven face, had made him afraid.

"Better keep tab on him," Lundy advised his friend, when he knew about Polk's ultimatum to Redford. "He's apt to try to put you out of his way. And—he may have you arrested for carrying that gun."

"I dare him," smiled Polk. He went on, very seriously: "I don't want you to think I'm a coward for refusing to fight Redford with my bare hands. It's a matter of discretion, rather than courage. Can a man fight a bull with his hands? But you know how it is. You, too, refused to fight Redford with your hands. Look here, Jackson—old Pete Garlin has stopped making baskets for the commissary, and what the dickens are they going to do now—I mean the Garlins?"

Lundy's shoulders slumped. He seemed so much concerned that Polk stared at him fixedly. There was but one solution: Pete Garlin had stopped making baskets for the commissary because he suspected that somebody was giving him money in that way!

"Oh, I understand!" exclaimed Polk. "I see very clearly now. It was you, Jackson, that was paying four prices for those baskets! I wish I had gone in with you on that. Own up—wasn't it you?"

It was a straightforward question, and it drew a straightforward answer:

"Yes, it was me. I went down and saw the Garlins, and I was sorry for them. And I—I'll own up to this, friend, because you owned up to the same thing to me—I fell heels over head in love with Bess Garlin. Let's you and me have a sort of a showdown, Polk. Listen to me.

"Polk, that girl is goin' to have to marry as a matter of—of survival. I couldn't give her what she deserves, if she married me.

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I'd rather die than to lose her, even to you, friend; but—it would help to bear it, Polk, if I knew you was worth a little somethin' in this world's goods, and if I knew you wasn't hidin' yourself here because you've done—the devil, Polk, I can't think you've done anything disgraceful! And yet, I wish you'd make me *know* that you're good enough to marry Bess!"

At that the for-the-time-being timberjack gripped Lundy by both shoulders and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Jackson, old man," he said earnestly, "I want you to believe me when I say that I'm not hiding myself here because I've done something unlawful. There are a number of reasons why a man might be with a logging outfit under an assumed name. For instance, a fellow might be figuring on buying the outfit; or he might already own the outfit, and wish to see for himself just how it was being handled—now mightn't he? As to what I'm worth, I guess I could scare up four to six thousand dollars of my own money in ten days. I hope you can believe me, Jackson!"

Lundy did believe him. And then and there Lundy began to shoulder the cross that he had made for himself.

"I'll do anything I can to help you marry that girl, Polk," he said, with his voice near to breaking. "And maybe I can do more than you think."

The man who called himself James K. Polk felt for the hand of his good friend whom he loved as a brother.

The next day was Sunday, the play-day of the logging-camps. About the middle of the morning, Lundy stole off and went to see Bess Garlin.

He came upon her in the woods, beside the creek that bore so bad, so incongruous a name. She was gathering pine knots that were to be burned for light. When she saw him, she threw down the wood and stepped toward him eagerly.

"Big Creek," she said to him softly, "I want to ask you something. Did you buy those baskets through the commissary?"

He ignored her question.

"Bess," he began, "Jim Polk loves you. And he's a fine, good man. I know I can't have you, so I want Jim to have you. He'll always be good to you and your dad. Bess, you know why I can't ask you to marry me. It's all for your sake. I'm outlawed—I advise you to take Jim; and you know I wouldn't give you crooked advice. He'll ask you. I'll get clean out of your life. I'll thrash Joab Redford, and then I'll hike for the West and never come back."

"Marry Jim Polk!" gasped Pete Garlin's daughter. "I can't do it! I do like him, but I can't marry him. It would be mean, dishonorable, to sell myself like that. God would never forgive me, Big Creek!"

"Don't you think that," replied Lundy. "I'm no religious man, but I sure know one thing that a lot of religious folks don't know: I know that God is God, and not a big bear. You marry Jim Polk and live like a white woman. You must! There's nothing else for you to do. After a little while, you'll love him. I love him, Bess. I love him."

Believing that sheer necessity would force her to do his bidding, he turned and left her without a last caress, without even a word of farewell; and the cross he bore stooped his broad shoulders and bowed his head. Bess stood and watched him silently as he started for his never-never land. Her brown eyes were wide and dry, and full of the shadows of pain.

When he had disappeared around a bend in the laurel-lined path, the laughing tinkle of the stream at her left became a doleful miserere, and the sweet song of a wood-thrush in a near-by tree was to her a song of anguish.

Less than half an hour later, Jim Polk found her on that same spot. She sat with her head bent, silent, suffering. He asked her to marry him, and she told him that she couldn't. She told him that Jack Jackson had just been pleading for him; that she loved only Jack Jackson; and that she would die, though it were death by starvation, still loving Jack Jackson.

And then, in Jack Jackson's name, she kissed him on the forehead, turned and ran swiftly homeward.

JOAB REDFORD had been gone most of that morning; and when he returned to the Purgatory Fork camp, his eyes were aflame from the effect of fiery new whisky. Big Creek Lundy saw that Redford was going to make trouble very soon, and he began to watch the hairy giant closely. He was ready to fight his way to his last greatest logging-camp victory, and then disappear.

The opportunity came almost before he expected it. He was lounging on the long,

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rough porch of the boarding-house, with a score of other timberjacks, when he saw Jim Polk coming slowly across the clearing. Redford saw the man he hated above all other men, strode down the steps and went toward him.

Polk halted and stood tense, ready for any emergency. Redford walked, half crouching, to a point within thirty yards of Polk; and not thirty feet behind the half-drunken Goliath was the watchful, panther-like Big Creek Lundy. The onlookers sensed imminent tragedy, and held their breath.

Joab Redford straightened vaingloriously, and cried out in a hoarse bass voice:

"If you won't fight me my way, Polk, I'll fight you your way! Get out the little blue gun—I'm goin' to show you I'm some marksman——"

His right hand flew under his corduroy coat and to his hip, and came back filled with steel and polished black walnut. A tongue of flame spat itself from the revolver's muzzle, and a slug of lead sang like a mad wasp toward Jim Polk. For all his quickness, Polk was half a second late in the draw. Redford's first bullet wounded and temporarily paralyzed his gun arm, and his weapon dropped to the ground.

"How's that?" taunted the bully. "And how's this?"

Polk was picking up his revolver in his left hand. He couldn't shoot well with his left hand, therefore his chance in the duel was next to nothing. But before Redford could fire again, Big Creek Lundy cried out, as though in warning—

"Look behind you, Joab!"

Redford wheeled and saw that Lundy was almost upon him. He fired at the man who had just saved Jim Polk's life, and missed narrowly. Again he fired and Lundy ducked barely in time. His next bullet wounded the redoubtable Big Creek slightly in the forearm; and then Lundy closed with Redford, wrested the revolver from the great hand and threw it away, stepped back and took on his old fighting pose.

"Come on, you——brute!" he invited, with a hard, white smile. "Come on and tie up with the real champion of Purgatory Fork!"

Redford stared amazedly. He bit off an oath and dashed for his adversary. Lundy eluded his clutches as easily as a panther would have done, and at the same time planted a chest blow that staggered the bully. A ring of excited loggers had formed itself about the two; and among them, paying no attention whatever to his wounded arm, was James K. Polk.

"Easy, Jackson!" shouted Polk. "Easy, old man! Let the animal huff and wear himself out—and don't waste blows on his chest!"

He had a double motive in this: he would help his friend, and he would keep the bully enraged; men who lost their heads, of course, were at a marked disadvantage in a close fight.

But Joab Redford knew better than to lose his head. The blow that Lundy had given him seemed only to sober him. He assumed a crouch, deliberately sized up his man and went cautiously toward him. Lundy realized that he wasn't going to have a walkover. While he had never carried a whipping at the hands of any man, he had never before fought so huge, so bull-like a fighter as this.

Redford led out with a feint, and followed it with a terrific blow that passed barely clear of Lundy's shoulder; and Lundy saw his opportunity and placed a neat right hook heavily on the point of the other's black-bearded jaw. Redford involuntarily clapped a hand to his aching face, and Lundy gave him a straight, quick punch at the bottom of his breastbone.

"That's the medicine, Jack!" Polk cried enthusiastically. "Hit him where it hurts!"

The bully swore and leaped again to the offensive, and this time he landed with a right drive that sent Lundy backward and through the ring of onlookers. It was enough to kill a weaker man. Jim Polk groaned; and so did many others, for Jack Jackson was not without his score of well-wishers among the loggers. But Lundy recovered himself with a readiness that surprised them all; and then he further surprised Redford by bringing first blood from his mouth.

Another moment, however, and Lundy's mouth too was bleeding. Five more minutes, and it looked as though he were going to have the worst of the battle, in spite of his splendid fighting. Joab Redford's wonderful and enduring ability to take punishment was little short of marvelous.

James K. Polk's spirits began to fall rapidly. Again and again he tried to give his friend encouragement.

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"Don't try to win out too fast, Jack," he kept saying. "Choose your blow, and don't take chances."

Lundy began to spar for time in which to catch up with his breathing. Polk feared the end was near for him; and yet, in the light of Lundy's eyes there was something which told Polk that he was far from being done for. Then Lundy began to handle himself with a strength that seemed wholly fresh. The fight became such a swift mixup of flying arms and legs and heaving bodies that the watchers couldn't tell half the time who struck and who received the blow. It was no mere spurt on the part of either man; they kept it up for minute after minute.

But that terrific pace had to tell. Before long the fighters were breathing in hoarse gasps. To each of them the extremity had come. Then Lundy put Redford to backstepping crazily, pressing him relentlessly with blow after blow. A little of this, and the giant logger lost control of his better judgment; he fought wildly and to no purpose, gurgled out oaths and slavered in blood. Soon he went down in utter defeat, turned over and hid his bleeding face in the cool grass.

When the loggers realized that the unbelievable had come to pass, that the bully whom they had feared for so long had been vanquished, they sent up a ringing yell. The victor faced about, still panting heavily, and Jim Polk seized one of his battered hands.

"It was great, Jackson!" Polk declared joyfully. "Oh, it was great!"

"Great is right," laughed an old timberjack. "You bet it was great! The' never was but one other man 'at could fight thataway. And that other man was Big Creek Lundy."

He was looking straight at Jack Jackson, and there was a peculiar twinkle in his kindly eye.

"I," proudly said Jack Jackson, "am Big Creek Lundy—with a beard."

The old woodsman showed no surprise whatever.

"I'd already figgered it out, Big Creek," he said. "Sev'ral of us did. We never said nothin', acause we thought you wouldn't want us to. Shake wi' me, Big Creek!"

James K. Polk seemed somehow bewildered. But he drew himself together quickly, and smiled as though he were very glad to make the acquaintance of the Purgatory Fork champion of that day and other days.

Lundy greeted all his old friends warmly, and went to the boarding-house to wash himself and to bind up the shallow bullet-wound in his forearm. When Polk had had a blue bandanna tied about his wound, he went to the defeated Joab Redford and began to talk to him in tones that, considering that which he was saying, seemed very kindly, indeed.

A LITTLE later, Polk took Lundy by his sound arm and walked with him across the camp clearing, into the woods and toward Pete Garlin's old log house. Lundy asked no questions; he knew there could be nothing wrong in his going anywhere his friend wished him to go.

They found Bess sitting on the honeysuckle-shaded cabin porch. In the doorway beyond her, old Pete sat sleeping with an open Bible on his rheumatic knees. The smooth-faced man took off his hat, and Lundy awkwardly followed suit. The girl rose and greeted them blushingly.

"Big Creek," began Polk, "you're going to marry Bess as soon as you can get her to a preacher, and I'm going to send her a hundred-piece set of chinaware as a wedding present. It'll be all right. I understand everything now; I know what you're afraid of, and you needn't be afraid any longer. Even if you're ever brought to trial, which I very much doubt, you'll get off light——"

Lundy cut in excitedly:

"Get off light! With a Caperton judge, and a Caperton prosecuting attorney, and a Caperton jury? Don't you believe it, Jim! They'd give me the limit. Why, Tom Caperton took oath——"

Here Polk smilingly interrupted:

"I know. It was a fool oath, and Sheriff Caperton wishes he hadn't taken it; it was almost wholly on account of that oath that he's been hunting and hunting for you. But I think he can keep it, and that without damage to you. Let's see if he can't——"

With twinkling eyes, the man who had called himself whimsically James K. Polk went on:

"Big Creek Lundy, I arrest you in the name of the county and the law; and in the name of friendship and this woman, and because I owe you my life, I set you free. I am Sheriff Tom Caperton, Big Creek."

"No!" cried Lundy.

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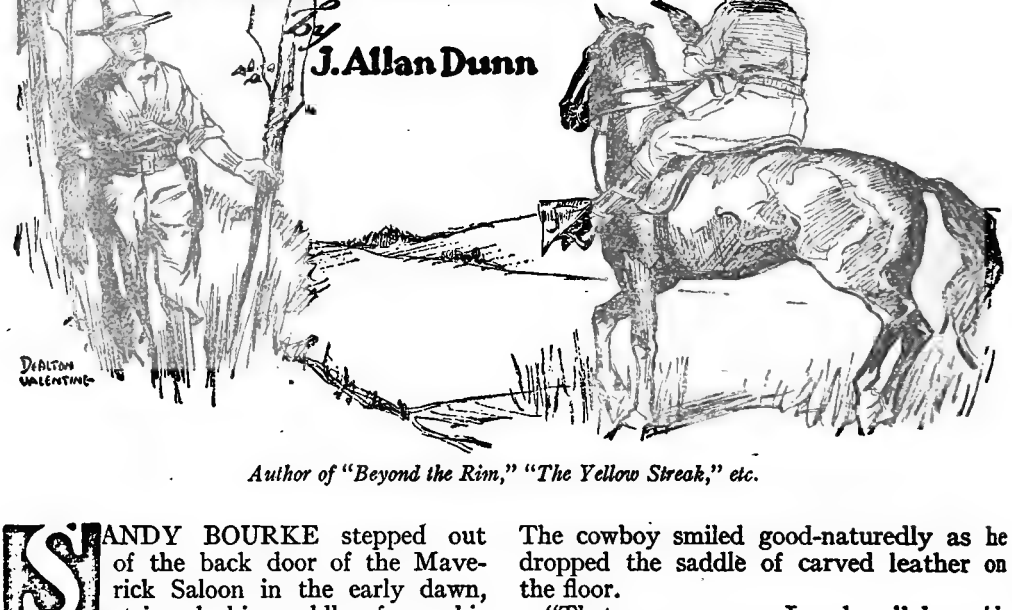
"But I am," declared Caperton, alias Polk. "And as to my oath of office, this is my duty as I see it. As I have heard you yourself say, God is God, and not a big bear. Anyway, it would only be a jail sentence, on charges of carrying a pistol and malicious mischief. It's a kind of a joke on both of us, isn't it? You grew a beard and deceived me, and I shaved off my beard and deceived you! But we didn't know each other very well, until recently.

"Now I must go and try to find a way of taking Redford to Gladeville this afternoon. I've got him locked in the toolhouse, arrested on charges of carrying a gun and assault with attempt to kill. Good-by, Bess—and good-by, Jack Jackson!"

He shook their hands, turned and left them, and he went without looking back. Big Creek Lundy passed his wounded arm around the girl's waist, and they watched him until he was out of their sight.

And Lundy stood up straight, for there was no cross on his shoulders now.



Author of "Beyond the Rim," "The Yellow Streak," etc.

SANDY BOURKE stepped out of the back door of the Maverick Saloon in the early dawn, stripped his saddle from his waiting pony and reentered, whistling blithely.

Five men sat around a green-topped table, worn by constant usage to a greasy nap. A mass of chips lay in front of one of the players whose dark face showed the blue muzzle of an unshaven beard. As he brushed back his hair he disclosed the red cicatrice of an old knife-wound.

A lamp shone wanly in the increasing daylight. On a side-table was a disordered array of bottles and smeary glasses. The room was foul with bad air and tobacco smoke. The men were disheveled and their faces drawn with lack of sleep and the reaction from the excitement of the game. The cowboy smiled good-naturedly as he dropped the saddle of carved leather on the floor.

"Thet evens us up, I reckon," he said. "I'm keepin' the rope but I'll send you the *tapaderas* if you'll tell me where. I left 'em behind this trip."

"You can keep the saddle until you git to wherever you're goin'," said the other with an assumption of good-fellowship. "I ain't aimin' to send a man bareback cross-country because he misjudged his hand."

"Thet's all right," said Sandy. "It ain't the first time me an' Pete's been down to short rations and a blanket. And I sure misjudged thet last hand. I didn't know you was so well acquainted with the royal family."

"Meanin'?" The unshaven man spoke

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casually but his eyes narrowed and his lax body stiffened to nervous tension.

"Meanin' nothing," replied Sandy cheerfully. "When I think there's anything wrong I make sure of it. Then I speak right out."

His cold gray eyes contradicted his friendly tone and the two men measured glances.

"Where did you say to send the *tapaderas?*" asked Sandy when the other shifted his glance to the chips in front of him.

"The 'Double-Lazy-H' is my outfit. No hurry about the saddle."

"Nice easy brand to mark," said Sandy casually. "I must be gettin' along. Neveh mind about the saddle. I'll send over the *taps*."

He had barely left the room when the winner called loudly for "Jerry!" The door opened and the owner of the Maverick appeared.

"Another round before breakfast, Jerry. Get the Chink to fix us up some ham and eggs. Who was the lean rooster who set in with us last night?"

Jerry grinned.

"You seem to have trimmed his comb some," he said. "His name is Sandy Bourke. He's riding over to Erl Madden's."

"The —— he is! Then he's goin' to be a neighbor. Mebbe we'll meet up again with him some day. Hurry the grub, Jerry."

Meanwhile Sandy rode through the sage, inhaling full breaths of the rare, clean air that blew from the hills lying purple along the border of Wyoming and Colorado. He sat his horse as easily as if his saddle was not lying on the floor of the Maverick's back room, and spoke to his mount as he rode in the fellowship of the wilderness that wears thin the line of demarcation between a man and his beast.

"Fine style to arrive on a new job, I'il ol' pie-eater," he said. "And thet saddle as good as new and settin' us back seventy-five bucks for it in Laramie. 'S all my fault in buttin' in. I neveh knew a man yet who horned into a game thet didn't pay for the privilege. I've still got my doubts about them four kings, Pete. Ef I ever set in with thet bunch again I'll keep my eyes peeled a mite closer. Trot along, I'il hawss. Your belly's full an' mine's glued to my backbone an' there's twelve mile ahead of us."

The horse tossed its head, reached back to give a friendly nip at Sandy's stirrupless foot and lengthened its lope. Sandy commenced to sing from the "Saga of the Sage:"

Gray is the land as a silent sea,
Nobody sailin' it now but me;
Over the mountain my harbor lies,
An' its bearin'-lights are my sweetheart's eyes.

Suddenly his eye caught a movement in the bushes, his hand swept down to his holster and back again too swiftly for any analysis of motion, and he literally slung two bullets from his right-hip gun. He dismounted and picked up two fluffy willow-grouse, shot fairly through their heads.

"Mebbe I'll eat after all, Pete," he chuckled. "If they's a stream the other side of the draw we'll stop fo' breakfast."

He was riding up a long incline that drained the foot-hill spurs which were gradually closing in on either side of the trail. Ahead, the line of crest showed crisp against a pale streak of yellow sky, as sharply defined as if it were the very rim of the world and all space lay beyond it.

A figure appeared in the gap, riding swiftly across. Sandy shaded his eyes against the sunrise, reined in Pete and intently watched the horse and rider until they disappeared. His keen gray eyes had noticed something that would have passed the observation of the ordinary range rider at that distance.

"It's a gel, Pete," he said. "A gel ridin' 'stride an' wearin' a man's outfit."

THE ranch of Erl Madden, whose registered brand was the Four-Bar, lay in the horseshoe bend of Sweetwater Creek, its buildings and corrals shaded by cottonwoods and box-elders and bordered with emerald fields of alfalfa. A small orchard and a kitchen garden proclaimed diversity of fare and Sandy surveyed the well-kept premises with approval as he turned Pete into an empty corral and approached the ranch office on foot.

Madden was at his desk, a big, brisk-mannered man who surveyed his visitor from top to toe in one swift glance of appraisal.

"Didn't hear you ride up," he said. "You're Bourke?"

"Left the hawss in the corral," answered Sandy.

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He liked the looks of Madden, aggressive and reliable.

"I'm Bourke. I'll have to borrow or buy a saddle from you, Mr. Madden. Otherwise I'm ready to start work. I had to leave mine behind. I owed it to a man on a little deal."

The smile that he flashed on the ranch owner was perhaps less effective than the record he bore, which lay in Madden's filing cabinet, but there was a twinkle in the latter's eye as he answered.

"You'll find two or three in the leather room. Take your pick. They're not fancy but you may find one to suit you. And I'll make a fair deal on the question of payment.

Sandy's white teeth illumined his lean brown face once more.

"I'll go find one. Where do I head in?"

"Had breakfast?"

Sandy nodded. The grouse had been cooked and eaten half an hour before.

"All right then. I'm going to let you bunk alone in what used to be the milk-house. I don't want the boys to know too much about your goings and comings. And you'll eat with me, for the present at any rate. You're a two-gun man, Bourke?" he added with a glance at the blued Colts that swung low from Sandy's belt.

"I handle 'em some. I don't aim to be oveh hasty about it."

"Good. I hope you don't have to use them, but I need a man on this job that can take care of himself. Bourke, I run between five and six thousand steers, one year with another. The ranch is hilly but I've owned it twenty years, and I know pretty well where to look for strays. I have been missing cattle for the last two seasons, not a few here and there, but fifty to a hundred at a clip. Last year I figure I lost three hundred three-year-olds. With beef at the present prices that has got to be stopped. I'm paying you seventy-five a month to stop it."

"How many this season, far's you can tell?" asked Sandy.

"Almost as many already. One bunch of over a hundred is missing from where they were grazing beyond Elk Mountain a week ago. Vanished out of sight."

"Any clues?"

"They seem to disappear on the north side of the ranch, over toward Lost Cañon. The hills come down there to a wide strip of wash and outcrop. But we've never caught sight of them or heard them being driven. It's always done at night and always from some place that isn't being watched."

"Inside information?"

The ranch-owner looked troubled.

"I've had all my boys with me for more than three years and I hate to think any of them have a hand in this. I always treat them white. Nights there's been a drive they've all been accounted for."

"What's this Lost Cañon?"

"I've never seen it. Never seen anybody who did. But there's a story that there's a cañon that opens up in the hills from a narrow entrance that's hard to find. Old hunters said there was a herd of buffalo still in there. Once in a while a man 'ud start out to locate it and come back and swear there was no such place. Then another one would show up and claim he'd found it and seen the buffalo. Just plain yarns, I take it."

"Are the hills steep?"

"Too steep for cattle to get over. They run that way for most of the north side of the ranch. There's the map."

Sandy walked over to a framed chart of the Four-Bar, drawn to scale, and surveyed it carefully.

"Ever find your fences cut?" he asked.

"No. I've always had them ridden right after a raid and searched for sign of new wire. The cattle are gone but they haven't been driven off the ranch. It's a mystery, Bourke, and it's up to you."

"Who's your neighbors?"

"It's timber-land to the south, where they're cutting for railroad ties. North the foot-hills climb right back to the range. West the land is free range mostly, and east Judson runs the Double-Lazy-H."

Sandy's eyebrows raised a trifle.

"Man with a scar on his forehead where some one slashed him?"

"Yes. Indian did it, he claims. 'Scar' Judson they call him. His ranch runs across mine like the stroke of a T to its stem. We don't get along together. I don't want to let prejudice creep into this matter, Bourke, but Judson has been selling heavy of late, too heavy for natural increase and his herd doesn't seem to get any smaller. I'm not accusing him but——"

Sandy was still studying the map.

"How long has he had that brand?" he asked.

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"Three years since he registered it."

"It wouldn't take much of a trick to change Four-Bar brands to Double-Lazy-H's."

"I know it, man. He claims his Double H's stand for 'Hereford Herd' but he don't say why he brands them lying down. He's got a right to his own fancy. And I've watched him and his men pretty close. I'm telling you frankly, Bourke, the thing's beyond me. The steers are gone but they haven't been driven through the fences or over the hills. My range is all fenced and my round-up is separate."

"It's sure some puzzle," said Sandy slowly. "Ef I'm goin' to eat with you an' bunk alone I've got to have some excuse for it. What am I?"

"A man new to the country looking around to locate. You've had a letter to me from a friend of mine. That'll give you an excuse for riding round the country and asking questions of the boys."

"Thet's fine," said Sandy. "You ain't got a copy of thet map, have you?"

"I've a blue-print in my safe. I'll get it for you."

Sandy studied the carefully drawn map until noon by which time he had developed a mental photograph of the principal features. All afternoon he devoted to a careful inspection of the hills on the north border of the ranch. They were largely barren and precipitous, rising like giant stairs to the higher slopes where more propitious conditions allowed a good growth of timber. Here and there little box-cañons ran back and sometimes the deeper erosions suggested the entrance to a deeper ravine.

Toward the northeastern boundary a stream sprang out of the stony wash that was strewn with bigger fragments of rock. The water started from the ground a good half-mile from the cliff, but the latter gave evidence of the underground existence of the stream not far from the surface. A rank growth of brush and trees clothed the side of the hills for some little distance, the shrubs and grass blending into a tangle of uniform brown with the advancing Summer. The stony ground seemed to mark the wide bed of some long-dried-up river that had swept the base of the hills.

It took Sandy two days to thoroughly cover the hill territory. At the end of that time he felt convinced that no cattle could wander or be driven over that barrier. Lost Cañon he was inclined to consider a myth born of a bragging hunter. Next he rode the wire-fencing. The strands ran through the staples in the well-set posts mile after mile without sign of recent break or repair.

THE fourth evening he found the ranch in a turmoil on his return. Mr. Madden met him and beckoned him into the office.

"Another hundred head got away last night, Bourke. They were down in the northwest corner in a little park there. No reason for them to stray, plenty of feed and plenty of water. But they're gone. Bud Travis missed them this morning and rode back to tell me. We've been hunting them all day."

"Any sign?"

"Some pony tracks. They might have been Bud's, part of them, and the boys rode over the place in a hurry before they got to looking for trail. The cattle moved slowly toward the wash. Then they might have flown, for any tracks they left behind on that stuff."

"Was you with 'em?" asked Sandy.

"Not at the first. I was expecting a long distance call from Denver and I rode out later."

Sandy made no comment on the clumsiness that had over-ridden tracks that might have led to discovery. He had been too busy to mingle so far with the cowboys employed by Madden, and they seemed to regard him as a guest of their employer. He saddled Pete early the next morning and rode over to where the cattle had disappeared. Madden had pointed out the little park on the map and he had no trouble in finding it.

The short turf had been trampled badly but he made out the drift of a troop of steers toward the old river bed. He carefully scrutinized the stones on foot. Here and there boulders showed displacement, but the wash was bone dry and the sign was scanty. He came to the conclusion that the steers had gone east.

"Cattle don't walk in rocks for preference when there's feed an' water, Pete, ol' hawss," he said as he adjusted his cinch. "I think you an' me'll take a l'il ride oveh to the Lazy-H's and have a chat with 'Scar' Judson. Those *tapaderas* ought to show

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up most any day now fo' an excuse. If they don't we'll jog oveh anyhow jest to pass the time of day."

His quick ear caught the soft thud of hoofs on the turf. The next second Pete whinnied. Sandy looked up to see Timmins, Madden's foreman, riding toward him on a buckskin mare.

"Howdy?" said Sandy in friendly fashion.

Timmins nodded curtly.

"Aimin' to find out where the steers went?" he asked, his tone holding a hint of sarcasm.

"I ain't expectin' to find what you-all couldn't!" said Sandy evenly. "I ain't a wizard at that sort of thing."

"You don't act like a tenderfoot," said Timmins. "You don't ride like one an', unless it's the guns you seem so fond of packing, you ain't got none of the marks of one."

"I got into the habit of packing guns down South," said Sandy. "Don't seem natural to be without 'em."

"They're gen'ally took to be the sign of a man lookin' for trouble up this way," said Timmins. "Was you thinking of buying out the boss?"

The man's attitude was distinctly antagonistic and Sandy wondered at it.

"I'm lookin' around a bit," he said.

"Ranch or cattle?"

"Neither."

"Just loafing?"

The insinuation was made with a sneer.

"There's otheh things you can make money on," said Sandy quietly.

"What, for instance?"

"Raising horn-toads to sell to Chinese doctors," said Sandy.

Timmins flushed.

"I reckon you think you're smart," he said.

Sandy ignored the sentence.

"Which way are you goin'?" he asked.

"Back to headquarters, as long as you're trying to find track of them steers."

It was evident that the man had been watching Sandy's actions in the river bed.

"Well, I'm going the otheh way," said Sandy. "Ef you see any horn-toads you might let me know!"

He swung to the saddle and put Pete to a canter. Timmins muttered something under his breath, set spurs to the buckskin and galloped off to the ranch-house.

"Now I wondeh, Pete, what makes thet chap hostile," said Sandy as they made their way toward the northwestern corner of the Four-Bar holding. "Mebbe he don't like my looks. It's mutual. Hello!"

He had come to the line fence. Beyond it an incline sparsely set with sage rose toward two low buttes. In the notch between them, partly closed from his viewpoint, a curl of blue smoke mounted lazily.

"Madden didn't mention any one living oveh this way," he said aloud. "Reckon I'll take a *pasear* oveh there."

He left Pete by the fence with trailing reins and slid under the barbed wire. It was a good mile to the nearer butte and hot walking over the powdery soil. The smoke had disappeared by the time he reached it, hidden by the rise of the sandstone ledges. A narrow trail circled the foot of the butte and led south. Sandy's practised eye saw several signs of its recent use.

"That should lead to the head of the draw I followed coming up to the Four-Bar," he told himself, as he followed the path in the opposite direction. It wound between the two buttes, fringing a marshy place that centered in a pond. A tumbledown wooden fence commenced beyond the bog and he saw a little patch of cultivated ground in front of a weather-worn cabin of rough logs, from the chimney of which rose the smoke he had seen.

A girl, slim, dressed in a blue denim shirt and khaki riding-breeches with leather leggings, rode swiftly out from a bunch of willows. Her hair was concealed beneath her broad-brimmed Stetson and only the memory of the figure he had seen at the head of the draw, prevented Sandy from thinking her a boy at the first glance.

Her face was lightly tanned and her blue eyes shone angrily in it. A nickeled pistol shone in her right hand as she cantered swiftly into the path in front of Sandy.

"What do you want here?" she demanded.

The cowboy noticed the refined accents of her voice as he admired the clean oval of her face and the firm set of her scarlet lips.

"Why," he said, taken aback. "I was jest wonderin' who lived here. I saw the smoke."

"And came sneaking on foot to see what you could find out. Now you can go back again. I live here. Alone. And I don't want any spies 'round the premises."

In the presence of a woman, Sandy

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Bourke was undone. His wit and assertion left him tongue-tied. Whatever he privately thought of the sex and its attraction, the proximity of a girl produced an embarrassment which he hated but could not help. There were many ranches where Sandy's custom of wandering from one employment to another, despite all advantages and prospects, had, temporarily at least, left lonely hearts behind him. Women as a rule intuitively liked him and the fact that this girl openly mistrusted him added to his confusion.

"I reckon you can choose your own visitors, miss," he stammered. "I wasn't aimin' to put you out none."

"Then keep off the place," she said shortly.

A call came from the house and her face turned from golden brown to crimson. She wheeled her horse and galloped off, reining in half-way to the cabin to watch Sandy walking back along the edge of the marsh.

He did not turn his head, but kept on to the fence where Pete welcomed him by rubbing his nose affectionately against the cowboy's sleeve.

"It sure beats time, Pete," he said after he had mounted, "why a pretty girl like thet should lie. She sure had some reason, and it was a male one. Ef it's her husband, she's dead anxious for no one to see him. Like to scared me to death flashin' thet li'l pop-gun of hers. Now I wonder why a man is hidin' out thetaway?"

"ANYBODY living over beyond the west fence?" he asked Madden at supper. "I saw an old cabin from the top of the hill while I was lookin' for cattle sign."

"No one there for six or seven years," answered the ranch-owner. "An old hunter died there about that long ago."

Sandy went on talking about the disappearance of the herd. It was not his way to pursue a subject where information was scanty. He was working out the solution to his problem in his own way, thinking but not talking, except to Pete occasionally, when his rides got lonely.

The *tapaderas* that he had sent for arrived the next day and he took them over to the Double-Lazy-H ranch. A crowd of men were busy working over a herd of steers in a circular corral as he rode up, unobserved for the moment. The corral gate opened and the cattle were driven toward him and the outer roadgate of the ranch. Sandy drew Pete to one side to let them pass. There were about two hundred and fifty head of them and he looked at them closely to notice the branding.

Half a dozen men were driving and the nearest to him seemed to recognize him. He called to a horseman back at the corral who spurred his mount and came dashing up to the visitor. Sandy by this time recognized the man who had called out as one of the poker players in the Maverick Saloon and he placed two more of them as the cattle passed by.

The man who now hailed him proved to be Scar Judson himself. His manner was not over-cordial though he tried to change it as Sandy displayed his *tapaderas*.

"Come into the house," he said, "and have a drink."

Sandy acceded to his apparent anxiety to leave the proximity of the herd and rode over to the buildings. They presented a decided contrast to the businesslike aspect of the Four-Bar. Carelessness and sloth had left their plain marks everywhere. Two of the drivers of the steers came in presently and joined them in the drink.

"Like a little game?" asked Judson.

"No thanks," said Sandy. "I'm not in your class."

Judson seemed to take that as a compliment.

"Come over any time," he said. "How are things goin' over at the Four-Bar?"

"All right, I reckon. Madden has mislaid some steers, he was tellin' me."

"Ah, it's a rough range he has. Maybe they've strayed into Lost Cañon."

The rest of the men took this as a joke and Sandy was aware that they were watching him keenly.

"Stayin' there long?" asked Judson.

"Jest ridin' around a spell. It's a nice country. Well, I've got to be gettin' back for dinner."

He refused an offer to share their meal and the promise of a game in the evening. Nothing had been said about the steers by tacit consent, and Sandy left, escorted to the road by Judson, decidedly more friendly than when the cowboy first arrived.

A mile from the Double-Lazy-H Sandy

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saw a horseman in the road ahead of him who turned off by some trees and disappeared. He was still invisible when Sandy passed the timber which was only a narrow strip with clear ground back of it for several miles. As Sandy loped by he saw the clean imprint of a horse's hoofmarks by the side of the road where they had turned off. One shoe had left its cast in some soft adobe and he noted that the calk turned outward.

He said nothing to Madden as to where he had been but casually asked if Timmins had found any trace of the missing steers.

"I don't know," said Madden. "He's gone over to the hills to look for them."

"So that's a lie and it was the buckskin's shoe," commented Sandy silently. "The road to Judson's is a funny way to get to the hills."

He was up again before an hour after midnight. He had changed his tactics, resolving to sleep afternoons and ride sentry along the northern hills nightly when no one would suspect his presence.

He saddled Pete quietly and patrolled a section of the foothills in the starlight. There was no moon. Nothing occurred to arouse his interest until, close to dawn, while it was still dark, he rode homeward along the eastern boundary between the two ranches. A vibration of the taut wire stopped him for a moment. At first he thought it was some steer scratching itself. Then he swiftly dismounted and squatted by a fence-post listening.

A cowboy has a hard time to kill the monotony of Winter days and Sandy, having mastered all the intricacies of solitaire at a time when he was practically alone, had found in an old compendium of information the letters of the Morse alphabet and amused himself with learning the code. It had come in useful several times already and now he caught the sounds of regular taps coming over the barbed-wire. He was a trifle out of practise but the sending was slow and he had no difficulty in reading the message. Set down in dash-dot language it read thus:

– .... ..– . .. ... –.. .– .. .. ..–-..
... .– — – — .. .. . –.– ..–-..
– .– – .. ..– –. –.. ... . –.. ..–-..

The message read:
"Thursday. Salt Lick. Two hundred."

The tapping ceased with a final O.K.-T.K.S., the regular formula for a receipt. Sandy put Pete to his best gait, arriving just before the sky grew gray. From the window of the milk-house he could see the bunkhouse of Madden's sleeping cowboys. He waited for fifteen minutes until the sky was flushing and saw nothing. Then the door opened and Timmins emerged yawning, stopping in the doorway to call back to his men. It was not what Sandy had expected, but he swallowed his disappointment.

"Sneaked in the back way, I ought to have thought of that," he muttered.

THE NEXT day was Wednesday. There were no salt licks marked on the map but Madden told him that there were several along the hills.

"Three anyway. One at the western end near the little park where we lost the bunch of cattle and two farther east. Going to try for a deer?"

"Mebbe."

After Madden had described the localities more definitely Sandy put on his considering cap. It would be a hard matter to watch more than one of the licks at a time. The message was a positive indication of inside work and if he suggested a general watch, even at the last moment, the raid might be put off. He decided to await developments and get Madden to accompany him on a secret patrol. But the ranch-owner came to him with news of absence.

"I've got to go to Denver," he said. "I'm on the committee to see the legislature about the sheep ranges that are running us out of business. It doesn't affect me any, seeing I'm fenced, but I'm president of the State Cattle Dealer's Association and they've picked me for the job so I've got to handle it. I'll be back Friday."

"Were you expecting the message?" asked Sandy.

"Why, yes. Didn't I mention it to you? I did to some one. Then it must have been Timmins, last night. He was here when it came over the telephone. You had turned in."

Madden departed and Sandy was left alone with his problem. In the brief look he had got at the steers on Judson's ranch he had thought he noticed indications of freshly peeling hide on the brands, such as

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might have been made by the setting of an iron to complete the making over of "bars" into "H's." But he was not certain. Neither was he certain that Timmins had tapped off the code message over the barbed wire.

He was careful of not allowing his own dislikes and suspicions to color matters too strongly and, in the back of his head, he held an intuition that the man who had called to the girl from the tumbledown cabin was not entirely free from some participation in the stealing of the cattle.

He passed over the salt lick near the park. It seemed unlikely that a second run-off would take place there, and there were no more cattle in the immediate neighborhood. On Thursday night he turned in early after having lounged openly all afternoon in the hammock outside Madden's house, making himself the center of sarcastic glances and, he shrewdly suspected, similar comment. Pete he had left in pasture at the head of the horseshoe formed by the river, stowing his saddle out of sight in some wild-cherry scrub.

At ten o'clock he blew out his light. Quietly raising the back window of the milk-house, he slipped out. Pete came to his whistle and in a few minutes they were riding north and east. The two salt licks lay a mile apart and he took the more easterly, following Madden's directions of a notch in the skyline of the hills. He found the shallow ravine, set thick with quaking asps. In the center of the trees was a little glade to which converged deer-trails. There were a few cattle grazing which snorted at his appearance but no sign of the number he had expected.

He left the place and rode west to the next one, passing a big bunch of steers in a hollow. The night was quiet, without wind, and he could hear nothing unusual. The second lick was much like the first and after he had explored the little cañon he determined to return to the steers.

As he emerged Pete tossed his head. Sandy caught the quick thunder of hoofs that told him the cattle were on the move. Rounding the shoulder of the hill he saw them coming full pelt toward him in a blundering mass.

"They ain't stampeded," he muttered. "They ain't going fast enough for that."

He let the reins fall about the horn of his saddle and galloped toward them, a gun in either hand. The steers swerved a little at the sight of him and disclosed two figures on horseback, riding silently, driving the steers with swinging lassos. Sandy pressed his knees into Pete who answered with long leaps that stretched his belly to the ground as they raced toward the cattle-stealers. The men were now almost invisible against the dark flank of the herd and Sandy found no target for his ready aim.

A red flash stabbed the darkness, followed by a report. The bullet went wide. Sandy sped on, not wanting to risk killing a steer as long as he had nothing definite at which to shoot. The cattle wheeled from the shot and drove into broken ground, scattering among rocks and scrub oak. The men cursed openly, shouting to each other now that they were discovered.

Sandy, wheeling Pete on his haunches, fired a swift volley above the heads of the frightened steers and they went pounding off, intent upon separate security. The drive was broken. One of the men went west, the other rode straight at Sandy, shooting under the neck of his horse as he came.

Sandy replied. The night rider ceased firing with an oath. His horse plunged and, taking the bit in its teeth, tore off after the first fugitive, the horseman rocking in the saddle. Sandy rode to where he had seen something drop to the turf. It was a Colt's automatic stained with blood where Sandy's bullet had hit the holder's hand.

Sandy looked at it with contempt.

"Shucks, Pete," he said. "Thet ain't a man's weapon. There's no balance to it. I neveh saw a rangeman using one before. Now, the first job is for you and me to round up thet herd nearer to home. It's no use chasin' them all oveh the ranch though I'd like to know where they got in."

With Madden absent, he had breakfast with Timmins and the rest of the hands the next morning, but he made no reference to the events of the night. He thought Timmins looked at him curiously once or twice, but Sandy opened a conversation with Bud Travis about the Cowboys' Carnival at Cheyenne and later announced his intention of going fishing, starting off with a rod in plain sight.

He had determined to pay the occupants of the tumble-down shack a little visit. He followed the curve of the creek to the main road and rode along the fence on the outside until the buttes came into sight.

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There he made a circuit to come upon the cabin from its back. He had no present embarrassment at the thought of the girl in the conceit that he was following up his duty. No smoke came from the chimney and no one challenged him as he rode round to the front door, looking through the window before he alighted.

A MAN lay motionless on a rough pallet barely raised above the floor. His face seemed frozen with horror. Only his lips moved without sound. Close to the blankets was the coiled body of a rattlesnake, head upreared, swaying gently from side to side, its tongue vibrating while it seemed to choose a spot to send home the deadly fangs. From where he sat on Pete the snake was directly in line with the man's chest and Sandy did not dare to fire.

With infinite caution he slid from the horse and gently opened the front door that already stood ajar, inch by inch until he could sight the reptile free of the man. Almost as swiftly as the rattlesnake could have struck Sandy's hand went down and up again. There was a shattering report followed by the smash of crockery. When the film of smoke drifted clear the snake's head was gone and the reptile writhed blindly on the floor with a bloody neck. The man still lay prone upon the blankets repeating over and over the three words:

"Oh my God!"

Back of the snake a broken cup showed where the bullet had continued its flight.

Sandy picked up the wriggling reptile and flung it far out of the door, then knelt by the man. His head was burning with fever and his eyes glassy. Beyond the ability to roll his head from side to side he seemed unable to move. Sandy caught up a saucepan and ran to the spring and back again for water with which he bathed the man's head and moistened his lips.

The pulse was racing as he lifted an arm that seemed strangely rigid and heavy but presently reduced itself, the eyes lost their film and the man looked up at him.

"The snake!" he said. "It glided in at the door! It wanted the milk in the cup perhaps. But it stopped and coiled. And I lay here powerless. Oh, my God!"

"It's dead now," said Sandy. "What seems to be the trouble with you, pardner?"

"I am paralyzed."

Sandy felt a sudden gush of pity and remorse for having misjudged the man and the girl, though the mystery of their wish for secrecy was still unexplained.

"How did that happen?" he asked.

"A shot. Base of the skull." The man closed his eyes and seemed indisposed to speak.

"That's too bad," said Sandy. "What you need is a surgeon."

The man's eyes opened wide with terror in them.

"No, no," he cried. "I need no one. Leave me alone!"

A clear voice broke in. The girl was standing in the door.

"So you have come back?" she said. "I thought you would but I couldn't get him away. What do you want of the wreck of a man like he is? Surely he is punished enough?"

The rage with which she had first faced him had gone out of her eyes and now they were pleading.

"I don't know what you are talking about, miss," said Sandy. "I found a rattler about to strike your husband and I shot its head off."

"My husband?" she said. "He is not my husband. He is my brother. Then you are not—" her face showed relief—"you have not come here from Denver?"

"I haven't been there for three years," said Sandy. "I don't want to meddle none in your affairs, miss, but your brother needs a doctor, bad, if he's goin' to get fixed up."

He took in the poverty of the shack in a swift look.

"Ef—ef you-all feel you can't afford it jest at present," he went on, "why—why—mebbe we can fix that. My boss, Mr. Madden——"

The girl gave a sudden gasp of relief.

"Oh, are you working for Mr. Madden? I beg your pardon and I thank you—for killing the snake and your kind offer. But we can't accept it. You see——"

"Tell him, Sis," said the man. "He's the right sort. I'm sick of the whole thing anyhow."

"My brother," she said slowly, "was careless in his accounts. He got into the habit of spending money too freely. He collected an insurance policy and he—forgot—to turn it in. There was a fire—and Bob had to go away. He went without

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telling me. There are just the two of us, you see, and he didn't want to hurt me more than he had to. So he found his way up here and at last he wrote to me.

"We thought we could fix matters by selling some property that was left us but there is some trouble about the title—it will take time to clear it. I was afraid from the way Bob wrote that he would do something desperate so I gave up my position and came up here. The Protective Agency was watching me but I managed to get away without their knowing it. At least I hoped so until you came the other day and I thought you were a detective.

"Bob met Judson and was invited over to the ranch. But after they had won what money Bob had left they wanted him to go into some scheme with them and he refused. I arrived and Bob and I came over to this cabin. Judson came over one day and—insulted me. Bob tried to shoot him but Judson fired first as Bob turned for the pistol on the shelf. He left him on the floor and he hasn't been here since. I don't suppose he knows how sick Bob is, or cares."

"We'll make him care," said Sandy. "I'll be right glad to have a chat with him about it."

"You can't do that. He knows what Bob has done."

Her brother groaned.

"I got drunk and let the cat out of the bag, enough to put them wise. I don't know how much I talked but——

"I wish to God that snake had killed me," he went on. "I wanted it to but it wouldn't strike, just looked at me with its devilish eyes and licked its tongue as if it enjoyed it."

"Hush, Bob," said the girl. "The lawyers will clear the title and arrange things. Perhaps—perhaps we could let this gentleman help us. We could pay you back," she said, her eyes swimming.

Sandy swallowed a lump in his throat.

"Don't you worry about that," he said. "We'll get your brother oveh to the ranch. I'll answer for Madden. My name's Sandy Bourke. You can come along and nurse him afteh the doctor gets through. Madden's got a Swede woman for cook who'll help make it pleasant for you and I'll attend to Mr. Judson. There's a pay-day about due for him anyway."

"I wonder if we would dare to," she said. "Mr. Madden doesn't know us. It seems——"

"Madden'll be glad to do it for you and I've an idea that he'll be grateful into the bargain. That trouble you had with Judson, now, was it anything to do with stealing cattle?"

"He wanted me to go over to the Madden ranch as if I'd just arrived," said the stricken man. "I was to tell Madden I wanted to look into ranching and had heard his was the best kept-up place in the State. Madden would fall for it, he said.

"Then I was to work with a man named Timmins—" Sandy uttered a short exclamation—"and, because I would be free to ride over the ranch, I was to bring them information of bunches of cattle to be driven off that Timmins as foreman rounded up from time to time in a convenient place. They had another way of getting messages through by tapping on the fences, but Timmins was afraid they were getting too suspicious for him to keep that up long."

"How were they going to drive the cattle off?" asked Sandy.

"I don't know for certain. But there is an entrance into the Four-Bar ranch from a place in the hills they call Lost Cañon. The other end of it opens out to Judson's land."

"Do you know where it is?"

"No, except that it's not very far from Judson's fence. It's near a stream, I know. I heard them talking about having hard work to make the steers leave the water. It's where the stream comes up out of the ground."

"I know the place you mean," said Sandy, "but if there's an opening there I must be going blind. But I'll have another look at it. But Madden will be glad of the news. I ain't surprised none about Timmins but Madden will be. Now I'm goin' back to the ranch and telephone Laramie for a doctor. He can get here tonight and Madden'll be back by then. We'll have you fixed up nicely by tomorrow. I reckon we'd better not try to move him till the doc' has looked him oveh."

He escaped the girl's gratitude and the brother's thanks and swiftly returned to the ranch where he got his telephone connection. Timmins he found, was at the south end of the ranch and Sandy spent

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the afternoon in an attempt to find the supposed entrance to Lost Cañon. Look as he would, he could see nothing but precipitous, unscalable cliff, covered with a drying mat of brush and dwarf trees, indented occasionally with a shallow gully.

"What I need is an airyplane, Pete," he said. "Too bad you can't fly."

He returned disgusted. Madden was not expected until late but the doctor arrived at sunset in his automobile. Sandy met him outside the main gate and rode with him to the cabin.

"A COMPARATIVELY simple operation will remove the pressure," said the surgeon.

Being a Westerner, he expressed no surprise at the nature of the wound, asking no questions as to its infliction.

"Trephine will restore the use of his limbs," he announced, "but he will need quiet and above all, freedom from worry of any kind. You said something about removing him. That should be done before the operation. It will not be dangerous. It is not very far to the ranch. We'll take him in my machine."

Timmins headed the curious crowd of cowboys who watched the installation of the girl's brother in Sandy's quarters. Several of them offered to help and brought lamps to illuminate the milk-room where the doctor established a table with the aid of Hilda, the cook, to whom Sandy commended the girl. Knowing him to be intimate with Madden and a guest of the private table she made no objections. The doctor hustled the helpers outside when he had completed his preparations.

"I want you," he said to Sandy, "and you—" indicating Hilda—"I am going to ask you to get some fresh air," he said to the girl. "You'll do us more good by helping yourself that way. There is no danger."

"She is close to a breakdown," he said to Sandy as she obeyed reluctantly. "Lack of sleep and worry. She has been under a bad strain."

"You bet she has," said Sandy. "Now then, what do I do?"

The operation did not take long and the patient was put to bed with the promise of recovery. Sandy accompanied the doctor to his car.

"I'll settle with you personally for this, Doc," he said. "How much is it?"

"I'll send you the bill when the patient is on his feet," said the surgeon with a smile. "Goodby. Look out for that girl or she'll be needing my help."

As Sandy walked back to the ranch buildings he heard a muffled cry and saw two figures struggling in the shadow between two of the big barns. It was Timmins and the girl. She broke loose as Sandy ran up and faced the foreman pantingly.

"You coward," she said.

There was a lot of solid satisfaction behind the punch that sent Timmins to the ground. He got up slowly, Sandy watching, ready for either another blow or the use of a gun. The foreman made no show of fight.

"I'll get even with both of you for this," he said. "Next time your brother is moved, Miss Particular, it'll be to the jail where he belongs."

The girl gasped. Sandy was unmoved at this fresh proof of Timmins' intimacy with the Judson outfit.

"Thet works both ways," he said. "You're liable to get there first ef I don't take a notion to handle you myself an' save a heap of trouble fo' all concerned. Did he hurt you, miss?"

"Not much."

"'Not much' is enough. I'm goin' to lick the sap out of you, Timmins, as soon as we're alone."

The foreman's hand dropped to his belt. Sandy laughed.

"You're too slow on the pull, Timmins," he said.

His own guns were menacing the other's stomach, drawn too swiftly for the eye to follow.

"Stick your hands up," said Sandy. "Now back up to the side of the barn. I'm goin' to teach you a lesson. Spread your fingehs, Timmins. Spread 'em!"

Timmins opened wide his fingers high above his head.

"Hold 'em steady ef you don't want to lose 'em," said Sandy.

Both his pistols spat fire simultaneously, eight shots blending as four. The bullets hit fairly between the thumbs and fingers of the crestfallen Timmins.

"You wanted to know what I packed two guns for," said Sandy. "That's one of the reasons. The others ain't apt to be so pleasant."

"What's all this?" asked the voice of

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Madden, driving up in his rig. "Is that you, Bourke? And who is the girl?"

IT WAS midnight before the conference was ended. Madden had acted with the big-heartedness that Sandy's knowledge of human nature had led him to expect, promising to get his own lawyers to aid in arranging matters with the insurance company. The girl's tired winsomeness had evidently fascinated him.

"The news about Timmins is worth it," he said. "I'm in your debt, not you in mine. You go to bed and stay there till Hilda tells you you can get up again. We'll take Timmins over to Judson's in the morning, Sandy, and face them with him. Judson'll either come through or we'll round the lot of them up and turn them over to the sheriff. I'll get him first thing in the morning."

The morning found Timmins missing. He had managed to claw his way out through the dirt roof of the building in which they had locked him for the night. He had taken a horse and left, presumably for Judson's ranch.

"We'll wait till the sheriff arrives and then we'll go over anyway," said Madden. "He ought to be here by noon."

At nine o'clock the girl appeared, looking fresh from her night's sleep.

"I would like to ride over to the cabin and get some of my things," she said to Madden. "After I have seen how Bob is."

"He's fine," said Sandy. "Sleeping like a kid. He's moved his arms a bit, too."

Her eyes showed her gratitude.

"Look out for Timmins," warned Sandy as she rode away.

At eleven o'clock the woods beyond the river showed thick with a sudden haze and the wind blew down the scent of wood smoke. Fire showed suddenly in the timber, blazing fiercely. Madden called the men together with the big alarm-bell.

"The grass is dry as shavings," he said. "We've got to hustle to save the ranch."

They swiftly organized and fought desperately to beat back the advancing line of flame. The sheriff arrived with a deputy and took charge of one wing of the little army. Sandy commanded another and Madden held the center. The situation seemed desperate. If the buildings caught, the fire would perhaps gain strength enough to leap the loop of the creek and destroy not merely the range but the cattle, unless they broke through the fences.

Sandy rode over to Madden and suggested the possibility.

"They are holding it back at my end," he said. "We backfired. I'll try and locate the main herd."

"They were over by the west fence last night," said Bud Travis. "Reckon you'll find 'em nigh there now, 'less the fire has scared 'em."

Sandy caught Pete and put him to his best gait. A long gentle ridge divided the range from east to west and, as he topped the rise, he looked eagerly for the herd. All he saw was the girl, riding as hard as her pony would bring her. He loped to meet her.

"I left the horse by the fence," she said, "while I climbed through to get what I wanted. When I came back I saw the cattle being driven along the edge of the hills. They were going slowly with about six men herding them. None of them saw me. I tried to keep hidden until I saw you on the ridge."

Sandy saw through the ruse. With Timmins unmasked the jig was up for the cattle stealers. The fire had been deliberately started to cover a final drive of Madden's herd into the hills.

There was not a moment to lose. He wheeled Pete and raced him at a tangent toward the hills, striking for the place where the stream came up out of the ground. The girl followed. Twice he waved her back, but she shook her head and came on. Pete distanced her mount rapidly.

Presently Sandy caught sight of a cloud of dust. He urged Pete to his top speed and soon he saw the herd close to the place where the girl's brother said Lost Cañon should enter. They were still well ahead of him and traveling fast, hastened by shots that came faintly to him like whipcracks as the herders fired their pistols in the air.

"They'll run out of cahtridges at thet rate, Pete," he said grimly. "Do your best, li'l hawss."

He dropped into a gully, racing along over the short grass. So far he had not been noticed. He mounted a rise and saw the cattle disappearing into one of the gullies he had examined the day before. For the first time he touched the spurs to Pete and the pony responded with a burst of

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speed, running low to the ground, neck outstretched, his crimson nostrils wide open to relieve his lungs and his gallant heart.

They came to the mouth of the gully. It was less than two hundred yards in depth, ending in the brush-matted hillside. There was not a steer in sight.

The ground was trampled on either bank above the stones of the old bed of a stream that had fed the vanished river that once bordered the hills. A smaller herd, driven at less speed, could have passed without leaving a trace. Now there was ample evidence of their passing but none of their exit.

"They've gone clear through the hill," Sandy told himself.

He rode up to the end of the gully and examined the cliff ahead. It seemed the same as ever, too steep for climbing, covered with dried scrub growth.

"They went through somehow," muttered Sandy. "I'll start a li'l fire on my own account. It can't spread far with the wind the way it is."

He surveyed the signs closely and chose a spot to place his match. The flames started slowly but soon were roaring through the brush, leaping upward. The wind was at his back. Above, a heavy outcrop would check them as soon as they had destroyed the fuel at hand. As he watched it burn, examining his guns, the girl came up on foot.

"Go back to the ranch," he said.

"I won't," she answered stubbornly. "You may need help. I've got a gun."

Sandy almost laughed.

"Will you promise to go back for help when I ask you to?" he said. "This is going to be a man-sized job. I've got to follow them if I can't do anything else."

She nodded.

"Look," she said, "there's a door in the hill!"

At some time a landslide had closed the entrance to Lost Cañon. The stream had found a way through the base of the débris and then dropped to looser soil. And some one had bored a tunnel to the Four-Bar range, closed it with a heavy door of timbers and masked it with a screen of brush manipulated from the inside.

The door was charring. Sandy forced Pete up close to it. The fire had passed on above. It was as hot as a furnace in the vicinity but Sandy dismounted, picked up a boulder and battered at the door. The hot earth crumbled above him and fell down upon his hat and shoulders but he felt the timbers giving and kept on. At last he hurled the boulder at the planks and something gave way. The door swung sullenly back on one unburned hinge and revealed a short tunnel opening to green grass and bushes.

He remounted Pete and turned to the girl.

"Now go back and tell them to hurry," he said. She laughed.

"I can't," she said. "My horse is dead lame. He stepped into a badger hole just before I got here."

"Then stay here, *outside*," he said. "If I don't come back in a little while you'll have to walk."

Pete snorted at the heat but entered the tunnel.

LOST CAÑON was an almost perfect bowl. The stream showed once more just beyond the shaft. The little valley was fringed with aspens and carpeted with bunch grass, much of which was still green. Great boulders of granite cropped out here and there.

Sandy rode cautiously but at a good pace, fearful that the cattle had been driven out at the other end. Soon he caught sight of them, leisurely mounting the slopes at the farther side toward a gap. They had scattered a good deal among the rocks and six men were rounding them up toward the exit. A stubborn steer turned and sped back toward the grass, a rider after him. The man stopped with a shout and pointed toward Sandy.

Three of the men wheeled. There was a shouting consultation, the sounds of which Sandy could barely distinguish and half the men hastened the drive while the other three separated and rode slowly toward him. The distance was too great for pistol shooting.

Sandy reviewed his situation. There was a little fortress formed of blocks of granite lying close to the cliff with enough overhang to protect him from a downward fire. The men were now out of sight. He could see their horses grouped together. Somewhere among the scattered boulders the riders were crawling up on him. There was no room in the little fort for Pete. Sandy gave the place another survey and decided upon his course of action.

"I can stick it out here all day, li'l hawss," he said. "I'll send you home. Mebbe the

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girl will get you as you go through. Ef you won't let her mount you, ol' pie-eater, slide along to the ranch by yourse'f."

He stripped off the saddle as he spoke. Pete nuzzled him as if he understood and Sandy slapped him on his sleek haunch.

"Home, li'l hawss," he said. "Home!"

Pete looked at him and trotted toward the shaft. A shot cracked and the turf flew close beside him. He kicked up his heels and galloped away, pursued by another ill-aimed bullet. Then he disappeared in the tunnel.

"It's a bum shot thet can't hit a trottin' hawss," said Sandy. "They'll have to do better than that."

A bullet struck the boulder back of him and scarred it with a splash of lead. Sandy crouched between two boulders through which he peered cautiously on his knees waiting for his chance. Something gleamed above a stone. He fired. A gun flew high in the air and the head and shoulders of a man appeared for a second. Sandy's second shot hit him in the throat and he pitched forward on the grass. The cattle had disappeared through the gap.

"We'll get you back later," muttered Sandy. "Wondeh ef the fire's out yet?"

The gravel in front of him was plowed up and the grit struck him in the face. The shot had come from his left. A tiny plume of smoke hung for an instant above a rock before it dissipated into the air.

"I've got you spotted," said Sandy. "Now then, where's Number Three?"

He heard a slight scraping at his right, the scratch of a bootleg on gravel. They had him between two fires. He took off his hat and elevated it on one pistol barrel so that it showed above the rock. Instantly one bullet tore through it and another whistled above it. The first came from the right. Sandy leaped back, jumped like a cat to a ledge and waited. There was no sound for a while but the whirring of the *cicadas*. It was so still that a lizard came out near him and flickered over the rocks. Then Sandy gave a ghastly groan, waiting a moment before he repeated it.

The ledge was a shelf winged by rocks that sheltered him in a tiny cave. Slowly the head of Timmins appeared above between two boulders, looking for the body of the man he supposed he had shot through the head. His gun-hand was stretched out and he hunched slowly forward.

"Come in, Timmins," said Sandy quietly.

The foreman started and fired at the half-hidden body of Sandy. The missile tore off the high heel of his boot. Then Timmins sagged forward and lay wedged in the crevice, bored clean through shoulder and shoulder-blade, his head hanging down. His pistol fell to the ground.

"One left," said Sandy. "I hope it's Judson."

He regained his original position swiftly. There was no sign of his man and he settled down to wait.

"Ef those othehs don't come back before Pete or the girl get in touch with the bunch," he told himself, "there's no cause to hurry. But I sure hope it's Judson. He was ridin' my saddle the otheh day oveh to his place and I want it back."

A blue jay flew up scolding from a bush. Sandy's grip tightened on his pistols. The grass was waving, very slightly. He fired at chance. Some one got up from the grass and jumped behind some saplings. It was Judson.

"Hello, Jud!" said Sandy. "It's my deal."

He fired and the bullet splintered the pulpy tree as Judson dropped to his knees and returned the shot. It struck the stones behind which Sandy was sheltered effectually now that Judson had changed his base.

"I've got the edge on you, Judson," said Sandy. "I've got plenty of cartridges and I'll shoot those trees down in time. But I'll give you a sporting chance. Come out in the open and shoot it off unless you want to come along peaceably."

Three shots from the trees wasted themselves.

"Thet's foolish," said Sandy. "Your elbow's showing. Look out!"

Judson jerked like a jumping-jack, just able to keep hidden behind the trees, two of which were almost in line.

"I'll quit," he said.

"Throw out your belt then," said Sandy, "and walk out after it with your hands up."

Judson obeyed, tossing his gun and belt of cartridges into the grass and advancing sullenly, his arms extended.

"You can put 'em down now," said Sandy as the other came up to him. "I'll cinch you up."

As Judson lowered his arms swiftly, Sandy ducked and ran in on him while a knife sped gleaming from the other's sleeve

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and tinkled against the rocks. Sandy threw him down heavily and knelt on him.

"I ought to pound your face to a pulp for that," he said. "But Madden has the next call on you."

Judson had struck his head against a stone and lay unconscious while Sandy secured him with leather strips from his saddle, rolled him over on his face and walked toward the three horses.

"Here's where I get back thet saddle," he said.

A rifle cracked on the hillside above him. The rest of the cattle-stealers had returned with long-range weapons. He took cover as a volley followed. One of the horses reared and dropped kicking.

"Shucks!" said Sandy. "Keep still, you poor devil, you'll spile my saddle yet."

The brute was shot through the head but it still struggled until Sandy mercifully fired and ended its suffering.

He had none too much shelter now and the men above him had divided. The bullets began to come closer as they picked up the range. One struck fairly between his legs.

"I guess they've got the bulge on me this trip," he said to himself.

A SHOUT came from the tunnel. A knot of horsemen raced through, scattering along the hillsides in pursuit of the men who now galloped back toward the gap. Madden came over to him.

"Just happened along right," said Sandy. "I've got Timmins and another one. Judson's over there chewing grass. Where's the girl?"

"I made her stay at the ranch," said Madden. "That pony of yours nearly bucked her to death. It's a marvel how she stayed on. The fire's out."

The girl met them as they rode in with their prisoners. The sheriff and the deputy he had brought with him had joined in the pursuit of the men and the retrieval of the herd. The fire had been halted short of the buildings.

Her eyes shone.

"Bob can move all his limbs," she said. "And there's a message from Denver. He can go back. I don't know how to thank you all. Where's Mr. Bourke?"

Sandy was talking to Pete in the corral.

"You ought to be ashamed of yo'self, li'l hawss," he said. "I've a good mind not to give you back your saddle, treatin' a lady like thet. We've got to be travelin' soon, ol' pie-eater. The job's cleaned up."

"I've found you at last," said the girl. "I—I owe everything to you, Mr. Bourke."

"Why, you don't owe me a thing," said Sandy. "You evened thet up by ridin' Pete an' bringin' up the crowd. I was in a tight fix."

"Isn't there some way I can repay you?"

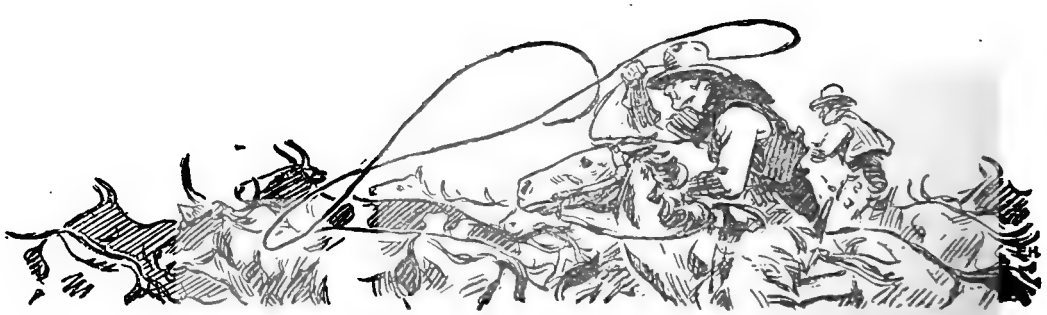
Her eyes were very bright and the breath came quickly between her parted scarlet lips. Sandy pulled at Pete's mane embarrassedly.

"You might tell me your address in Denver," he said. "I'd like to see thet brother of yours when he gets about again."

"Why surely," she said. "Will you be likely to be there soon?"

He looked at her for a full minute and she withstood his glance with glowing cheeks.

"Mebbe," he said. "I sure hope so."



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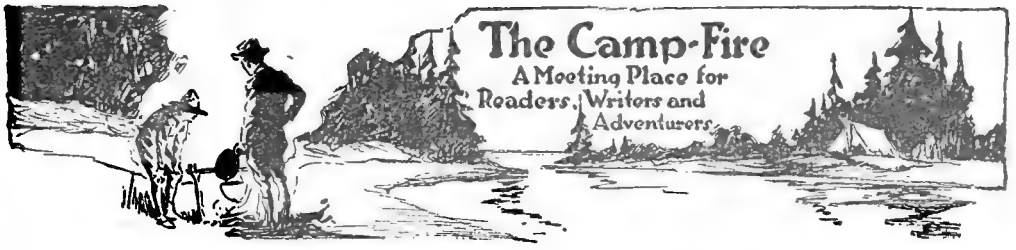

IT SEEMS that one of us, from whom I've heard from time to time, is a prisoner of war in Germany. In December, 1916, Pat O'Brien was in the Aviation School at San Diego. A while later I had a card from him saying he was in the British Royal Flying Corps and asking to have his mail forwarded to Canada. A bit later still he had risen from corporal to lieutenant and asked to have his mail forwarded to the other side.

In the Fall of 1917 I received the following letter:

September 17, 1917.

I write to tell you that I received word from France that my dear brother, Pat O'Brien, went out on a patrol on August 17th, and never returned. We are doing our utmost to get some information, but so far have not been able to.—MRS. CLARA CLEGG, Momence, Illinois.

Another of our American comrades in the Royal Flying Corps, Dean Ivan Lamb, had just landed here to give his services to the United States, and the next time he dropped in at the office I showed him Mrs. Clegg's letter. He had never met O'Brien, but sat down right there and wrote three letters to England that would probably get definite information if it could be had. A few days later came this second letter from Mrs. Clegg:

October 12, 1917.

Yours of the 8th at hand and will say that since writing you I have received word that a letter had been dropped by the Germans, to the effect that my brother (Pat O'Brien) is a prisoner in Germany, unwounded. Still I would be very thankful to you if you would put a paragraph of inquiry into the Camp-Fire department of your magazine, as the letter we received stated that its information could not be taken as accurate.—MRS. CLARA CLEGG.

Our magazine reaches out through the world along many thousands of threads, among us we have run down even more difficult trails that led to the firing-line, and perhaps some of us somewhere over there can supply the information wanted in this case.

ANYTHING having to do with lost treasure makes most people prick up their ears. Here's a pleasant little item about a cowpuncher digging up $400,000; but Mr. Harriman, who reports the report, doesn't suggest that you go a-digging:

Los Angeles, Cal.

CAMP-FIRE COMRADES:

You who have been interested in tales of buried treasure will be pleased to read this:

September 14, 1917.

H. R. Whitman of Solomonville, Arizona, reported at Phœnix that Jade Walsey, cowpuncher, had unearthed a cache of $400,000 in old Spanish gold coins and golden vessels. He was in the hills northwest of Solomonville, hunting strays, when he saw a shovel-handle sticking out of a tree-trunk. Digging brought to light an iron box containing the treasure.

It is supposed to be treasure left there by Spanish priests who left that section seventy-five years ago, while it was still a part of Mexico. The treasure has been taken to the county-seat, Safford, and deposited for safe-keeping.

NOW it will be in order for every dreamer in Southern California to get the fever and prospect the hills here for the treasure said to have been buried when Indians raided one of the missions. The story runs that two of the padres went with two neophytes and hid the church treasure but were all killed by the hostiles before they could rejoin the others. There may be a thread of truth in the story, but it is far more likely to be a canard. At any rate, with nothing to guide them, searchers would have a peach of a time hunting lost treaure in the thousands of likely hiding-places of our foothills and mountains. I'll bet I could hide a beer-keg there where Hindenburg's whole army could not find it in a month.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

WHEN our boys go to the front we want them to be in the best shape possible, minds as well as bodies, in their spirits as well as their spirit. We want this for their sakes, for our country's sake and for our own sake.

Here's one way we can help in getting and keeping them in the best shape possible. When they leave the every-day civilian life they've always lived in and go into camp they enter a new and strange world. But

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they don't cease being human. Most of them, however stiff they keep their upper lips, are likely to be homesick. Being human and young, most of them, left to their own devices when off duty, are likely to be more or less victimized at the hands of various human beasts of prey and to yield to the temptations that unfit them in many ways as efficient soldiers and sound, upstanding men. The more homesick or lonely they get and the more they are left to be strangers in a strange land, the more will they drift into various kinds of trouble for themselves—and us.

THEREFORE let all of us living anywhere near where our boys of any arm or branch of the service are stationed be among those who are opening their own homes to them and giving some of their own personal time and attention to making their off duty hours pleasant and interesting in wholesome and decent ways. Most of them don't care for pink teas and fluffy stuff in general, but most of them will appreciate from the bottom of their hearts any and every plain, ordinary, common-or-garden touch of simple, straightforward, man to man friendliness and friendship.

They are of all kinds and degrees. So are we. But they all have this in common—they are offering their lives in our service. Surely the least we can do is to show that, if they are our friends, we are theirs.

For example, why not get a few of them to help you with the Christmas or New Year's turkey? This is a season when they'll be particularly and everlastingly grateful for a touch of real home-life, friendly comradeship and good cheer.

WORD from a Camp-Fire comrade at the front. I've sent him some magazines, but that's no reason for not sending him more. Also he is one of those who want letter-friends.

Just a few lines to let you and the other "Adventurers" know how one of their comrades is faring.

I have been over here in this man's war for two years now—a year of which was spent in France. Believe me, it is a *war*, is this—no little "comic opera à la Mexicano." Until the attack and taking of Vimy Ridge I was fortunate enough to escape any of Fritz's "playthings," but there (Vimy) met my downfall in the form of eleven pieces of shrapnel in my back. Am out of hospital now and ready for another crack at old Fritz.

SINCE I have been over here have been unable to get copies of my favorite magazine, *Adventure*, with exception of old copies which I had already read. I would appreciate it greatly if some of the old Camp-Fire friends would send a few old copies.

Here with me are several of the boys I knew with Gonzalez in Old Mexico; would like to hear from more. Also from any one who would care to correspond. One gets a bit lonely at times. So if you will be kind enough to publish this bit am sure I could get some "letter friends" to whom I can write some interesting yarns of things that occurred "out there."—No. 264413, L. S. PHILLIPS ("Shorty").

25th Reserve Batt., Bramshott Camp, Hants, England.

AS STATED at our last Camp-Fire, we're going to revive our old "Letter Friends" department for the benefit of our boys in khaki or blue. Many of our comrades are where letters from "back home" are a godsend. For over three years appeals have been coming in for correspondents to help break the monotony of camp and trench life and to provide a thread tying the soldier to the old life and all it represents, and now that the United States is well into the war, the need is greater than ever. So we of the Camp-Fire are going to do what we can; and, judging from the number of responses the old department used to bring, we'll be the means of brightening things a bit for many a comrade who is fighting our battles.

Our past experience has shown, too, that a man advertising in "Letter-Friends" will probably get more letters than he can possibly answer. We should worry; he'll enjoy reading them just the same, and that's what we're after. On the other hand, it will take months to get the department under way (the magazine, as most of you know, has to be made up far in advance; for example, I'm writing this on October 16th), but once it gets going we may have more applicants than we can handle. These matters will adjust themselves as time goes on. Meanwhile we'll write letters, and if one man doesn't reply, that's all right, and we'll just send a word from home to some other chap.

THERE is too much possibility of good in the idea for it to be limited to one magazine alone, and I have written to the Committee on Public Information and other organizations suggesting that the whole question of providing personal letters and letter-friends for our soldiers and sailors could be easily and simply handled

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by asking all newspapers and magazines in the United States how many of them would be willing to give a little of their space to a department of this kind and then posting a printed list of those publications in all camp and field headquarters of Y. M. C. A., Red Cross, and similar organizations, at base hospitals, etc., telling each soldier to choose his own medium and locality but, in fairness to his comrades, to limit himself to one publication. I sincerely hope they will adopt the suggestion, for the need of letters from *anybody* at home is more keenly felt by our boys than most of us even dream.

LETTER-FRIENDS BACK HOME

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp or at the Front.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home," or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as the present temporary censorship is removed. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

(As the magazine is made up several months in advance, the above notice will appear with only such stray names as happen to come in to us until there has been time for it to reach the camps and the front and for names and addresses to reach us, be put in type and then reach our readers on publication.)

No. 264413, L. S. Phillips, 25th Reserve Batt., Bramshott Camp, Hants, England.

A. Tillemans, 2me Section, D 87, Belgian Army in the Field, Belgium.

MR. WADE ran across a book or something on Indian customs and found therein a statement that medicine men got their names from animals that live or walk close to the ground, while chiefs, on the other hand, took the names of higher animals and birds. George L. Catton sent us an Indian story and we sprung this bit of information on him in connection with the name of one of his characters. In the meantime we'd written to Hugh Pendexter asking him as an authority on Indians (he would deny being an authority on them, but he is) whether there was anything in this theory.

The replies from these two men, given below, seem to put that theory to sleep:

I used for my reference on that point Colonel Richard Irving Dodge, aide-de-camp to General Sherman, of thirty-three years' personal experience with the red men of the Great West. He writes:

"INDIANS have no surnames. . . . A man may have a dozen names, or no name at all. He may name himself, or be named by his companions. . . . On his initiation as a warrior . . . he has the right to name himself. . . . These names are intended to be expressive of some particular action or situation, and are generally adapted to a real or fancied resemblance of the actor to the known habits of animals or birds with which they are familiar. . . . The paint used on their expeditions (fights) . . . many names indicate the color of his paint—White Eagle, Red Dog, Black Beaver, etc."

Then we read: "Fifty years ago (1830) the office of chief was hereditary. . . . This, in most of the tribes, has been changed entirely. . . . It was fitting that the United States Government . . . should strike the first blow to free the Indian from hereditary despotism. . . . Now, *each chief of a band, or subdivision of a tribe*, no longer overawed by the Divine Right of a hereditary ruler, immediately sets up for himself."

THEN we read: "The position or office of medicine chief is not hereditary . . . and is not conferred by chief or council. A man gains it by general consent of the people of the tribe. . . . The medicine chief is dead. *A warrior* comes forward, who says 'I have found the proper "medicine,"' and after proving it to the tribe by and in actual combat—that point once conceded beyond doubt or cavil, and his character and standing being satisfactory, he glides into the coveted position by general acquiescence."

Then we find such names as: Little Robe, Spotted Tail, Big Mouth, Medicine Arrow, Lame Deer, Dead Arm—chiefs and medicine men.—GEORGE L. CATTON.

It might be that by coincidence in some isolated instance the medicine men bore names of creeping and crawling things, while the chiefs took the names as suggested in the article you refer to. But in all my reading I never found anything to substantiate such a belief. Always to the contrary.

I will condense from Dr. John R. Swanton's article on "Names and Naming" as published by the Bureau of American Ethnology:

"Among Indians, personal names given and changed at critical epochs of life, such as birth,

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puberty, first war expedition, some notable feat, elevation to chieftainship. Names divided into two classes: True names, corresponding to our personal names, and names which answer to our titles, etc. . . . The former define or indicate the social group into which a man is born, whatever honor they entail being to the accomplishments of ancestors, while the latter mark what the individual has done himself. There are characteristic tribal differences in names, and where a clan system existed each clan has its own set of names, distinct from all those of other clans and, in the majority of cases, referring to the totem, animal, plant or object."

I BREAK off to illustrate clan names, taking the Wyandot for example:

Man of Deer gens, *De-wa-ti-re*, Lean Deer; woman of Deer gens, *Ayajinta*, Spotted Fawn; man of Mud Turtle gens, *Sha-yau-tsu-wat*, Hard Skull; woman of Mud Turtle gens, *Yau-dac-u-ras*, Finding Sand Beach; man of Wolf gens, *Ha-ro-un-yu*, One Who Goes About in the Dark (a prowler); Woman of Wolf gens, *Yan-di-no*, Always Hungry; man of Bear gens, *A-tu-e-tes*, Long Claws; woman of Bear gens, *Tsa-man-da-ka-e*, Grunting for Her Young—and so on for Smooth Large Turtle, Striped Turtle, Porcupine and Snake gens.

TO RETURN to Swanton: "At the same time there were tribes in which names apparently had nothing to do with totems, and some such names were apt to occur in clans having totemic names. . . . The Kiowa, being without clans, received names suggested by some passing incident or to commemorate a warlike exploit. . . . Young men usually assumed dream names. The second name sometimes bestowed on account of bravery. The Pawnee did this during a public ceremonial. A similar custom seemed to have prevailed among Siouan tribes. After a man died his name held in abeyance for longer or shorter periods of time. If he were a Kiowa all the members of his family took new names. Among the Iroquois the official name of a chieftaincy, also official name of officer installed in it. . . . When names not taken from totem animal they were often grandiloquent terms referring to wealth or greatness of bearer. Names could often be loaned, pawned or even given or thrown away; on the other hand, might be adopted out of revenge without consent of owner."

FROM Garrick Mallery's "Picture Writing of the American Indian," B. A. E. (condensed):

"Indian names . . . when referring to an animal indicate an attribute or position of that animal. Whether objective or ideographic usually can be expressed in sign language. Receive several names in succession because of some exploit or adventure. All these names usually refer to material objects or actions. A warrior often changes his names many times after fights and hunting trips. The name he assumes for himself because of a dream or vision often is not the one he is habitually known by. Thus he is often known under several names. Deformities and peculiar adventures or mishaps are sure to fix a name. Several in the same tribe may have the same name, but seldom in the same band.

Example of some objective names:

High Back-Bone, Oglala, 1870; Broken-Back, Minneconjou Dakota, 1848; Long-Hair, Cheyenne, 1786; Big Crow, Dakota (he killed Crow Indian of unusual size); The Stabber; Red Shirt; Three-Stars (General Crook); Left-Handed Big-Nose; Spotted Face; The-Man-Who-Owns-the-Flute.

Some metaphoric names: Wolf's-Ear; Man-With-Hearts; The Tongue ("Tonguey").

Animal names: Bob-Tail-Horse; Two-Eagles; Bear-Looks-Back; Mouse; Badger; Spider; Spotted Horse; Spotted-Elk; White Goose; Spotted Skunk.

Vegetable names: Tree-in-the-Face; Leaves.

I append names of some noted warriors who also were medicine men: Sitting-Bull, Sioux; Crazy Dog, Dakota; Crazy Horse, Dakota; Black-Stone, Dakota; Cloud-Bear, Medicine Buffalo, Crazy-Head, Sacred Crow, White Elk, all Sioux; Sitting Bear (*Set-angya*), famous Kiowa chief and medicine man; The-Open-Door (*Tenskwatawa*), famous Shawnee prophet, twin brother of Tecumseh; The-Cock-Turkey (*Ah-ton-we-tuck*), Kickapoo, disciple of above; Four-Horns; Uncpapas; Lone-Horn, head chief and medicine man of Minneconjou. Elk's-Voice-Walking, same.

Names containing words of colors are thought to have mystic meanings. Some names of mighty warriors who were not medicine men: Little Turtle, Miami (in "Red Sticks"); Stinking-Saddle-Blanket, Kiowa; Little Crow, Sioux; Little Thunder, Sioux; Big Foot, Hunkcpapa Sioux; Big Bill, Paiute (led Indians aiding notorious John D. Lee at Mountain Meadow massacre; Black Hawk, Sauk-Fox chief; Black Fox, Cherokee; Black Hog, Shawnee; Blacksnake, Seneca; Two Strikes, Brule Sioux (and not a ball-game); The Rat (*Adario*), Huron; Broken Tooth, Chippewa; Cornplanter, Seneca; Crow Dog, Oglala Sioux; Curly Head, Chippewa.

J. N. B. Hewitt, B. A. E., in an article on "Chiefs" in part, says, speaking of Plains tribes: "Any ambitious and courageous warrior could apparently in strict accordance with custom, make himself a chief by the acquisition of suitable property and through his own force of character."

In nearly all tribes any man with sufficient force of character could assume the rôle of medicine man. Chiefs often did so. A. Hrdlicka, U. S. National Museum, in an article on "Medicine and Medicine Men" says: " . . . He announced or exhibited these attributes, and after convincing his tribesmen that he possessed the proper requirements, was accepted as a healer." Further on in same article: "If the medicine man lost several patients in succession, he himself might be suspected either of having been deprived of his supernatural power or of having become a sorcerer, the penalty of which was usually death."

I HAVE attempted to show by the above circumlocution that any warrior with a strong personality might become a chief or a medicine man, and often was both. That once a medicine man was not necessarily always one. His name had nothing to do with it. He could take a new name on becoming chief, like Little Turtle, the mighty Miami leader, or on becoming a medicine man, as Sitting-Bull. Many tribes had medicine women, namely, Pretty-Mouth and Captain Jack, Apache; Man-Who-Likes-Everybody, also Apache, but a mere male this time; High-Wolf was a noted Cheyenne medicine man. Nothing lowly or crawling about these.

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This is an awful screed to inflict on you, but I am writing it in a hurry (and thereby overlooking much excellent material, no doubt) and I thought best to go into it a bit, even at the risk of being prolix. The examples are accumulative till they would fill volumes.

I'm very glad you wrote me and mentioned Brown Turtle, as I would desire, if not too much trouble or too late, to change his name to Black Turtle. In my haste to get away from the historical Little Turtle I forgot that few Indian tribes differentiate between black and brown, although I've found such names among Zuñi and Siouan lists. And few distinguish between blue and green, having one word for both colors. So, if there be some one supercritical, they might question "Brown."—HUGH PENDEXTER.

WITH his first story in our magazine William A. Shryer follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself:

Detroit, Mich.

Born and spent my sweet young childhood in that contumacious community popularly known as "Terry Hut." After you have been to France you pronounce it differently, and as seldom as possible.

Am forty-one and don't look it, unless you sneak up on me from behind. Harrington Emerson once accused me of being a "convex blond," whatever that is. Am advised was a very engaging child. Consensus of intimate opinion at present refutes this interesting theory.

GOT a B. A. once. Said to be a more laborious process now. At the tender age of thirty-seven almost got an M. A. Spent three months at the University of Michigan in the interests of science, attempting to discover some possible relation between advertising phenomena and experimental psychology. Reported researches in *System* for six months. Concluded nobody was interested, much less science, so decided a year abroad more exhilarating than three months more for an M. A. Spent the cash and let the credit go.

In 1912 wrote a book on advertising. Weighs several pounds. One critic went so far as to say it was heavy in more ways than one. It proved a lot of advertisers were dead wrong, but few would admit it. Wouldn't have cared if more had bought. Think most of 'em went to the public libraries. They're an awful tight bunch.

Later wrote a two-volume business book. Got a number of people to contribute, which was a real bright idea. Sold a lot. Still moving. More money in fiction, though, if you want my advice.

WENT abroad in 1913. Visited Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Greece and one or two other places. Also saw Naples and managed to survive. Confess to a number of adventures, but protest wisdom of unexpurgated publicity relative thereto.

Met a lot of Italian Counts. Prefer a plain Wop any time. Also got chummy with the King of Greece's head gardener going to Corfu. Rode with a Greek bishop from Athens to Patras. He was a good scout. Let me test a set of bogus amber beads on his whiskers for electricity (in the beads, not the whiskers). Traveled from Patras to Rome with two smugglers of antiquities, winding up with a real adventure at Paris. Made a good story, but don't seem able to convince any editor it's worth the money.

HAVE spent a lot of time trying to demonstrate that William James was wrong. His theory that no man past twenty-five ever gains a single new idea outside his own business always annoyed me. Got married at thirty. Started a correspondence school at thirty-one. Still making the grade. Became an editor and publisher at thirty-five. James won a point, but I contend it should not be held against me. Successful publishers are born, not made. Learned the Egyptian written language at thirty-nine. Forgotten it since, so that's a half point each for James and me.

Wrote my first short story at thirty-eight and sold it. Laid off for three years and then wrote my first novelette. Sold it. Took heart and gave birth to "Old Josiah Simms, the Antiquarian Detective." He entered the arena at the ripe old age of sixty, *cap au jus*, just like the Pegasus, or was it Minerva? Parent and child doing well.

JUST sold my first story to *Adventure*. Hope to repeat, however. Too modest to send a picture. Spent thirty thousand dollars having it printed in the back of *Everybody's*, *System* and a lot of others less worthy, anyhow. Also, it cost $50 to get photo properly retouched, and it would be a shame to lose it. Editors are so careless about celebrities' pictures. Some say it looks like a Quaker preacher; others, like Jesse James.

Consuming ambition—to get as much per page for my stories as advertising managers have got out of me for space N. R. M. I'll have to go some, but what's the use of staking a good claim with a toothpick?

Last Call for Our Annual Vote

All the 1917 issues of *Adventure* are in your hands, from January, 1917, to Mid-December, 1917, inclusive, and the vote by our readers to determine the ten best stories in our magazine during this past year closes December 31. This annual vote is the best means we of our editorial staff can devise for making *Adventure's* stories the kind that please our readers best. It's up to you, so go to it.

The voting is simple and easy. Any one, subscriber or not, is eligible to vote if he's read at least seven of the 1917 issues. Serials, novels, novelettes, articles and short stories included; poems and Camp-Fire barred. The same author may appear on the list as many times as you please. All you need do is write down your ten selections numbered in order of preference, giving title and author of each, sign your name and mail us the letter or post-card. If you like, add as many as ten more stories for complimentary mention.

Remember that no stories are counted

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unless they were published in one of the issues *bearing the printed date 1917*—January, 1917, to Mid-December, 1917, inclusive. This issue in your hands and the First January (1917) issue are *not* included. However, a serial appearing partly in 1917 and partly in 1918 or 1916 *is* included in the vote.

The result of the vote will be published in a subsequent issue.

ONE day last July I was planting beans in the half-acre lot that some of us out on Long Island had made into a "war garden." Suddenly a voice behind me announced:

"Honest, mister, I ain't a bum. I've been up against it."

That being an old story I decided at once that he *was* a bum and that it was I who was up against it. So I merely looked around to see a young fellow squatted down beside me and looking the worse for wear.

HE SAID he was a sailor from one of our ships then at Philadelphia, that he had come to New York on leave, gone joy-riding with a bunch of men and been drugged by them, robbed of a large roll and dumped in a vacant lot to come to in the morning.

That, too, was just a new variation of an old story, so I didn't take hold very hard. Asked him a few questions, however, about his ship and saw that at least he had once been in our Navy. Then he stood up and I saw his pants. Navy pants. He let his civilian coat come open at the neck and I saw the rest of his uniform. Also, taking a good look at his face, I saw that it wasn't just plain booze that he was recovering from; it looked like knock-out drops to me.

SO I QUIT planting beans, took him up to the house and did what little I could for him. If by chance one of his engineer officers sees this and happens to identify the case I'd like to testify for this adventurer. I gave him some stuff to settle his inside a bit and he drank some black coffee. He would take no food because he had no place to put it where it would stay. Incidentally, he wouldn't take anything in the line of strong drink when it was offered. His one idea and ambition was to get back to Philadelphia and report himself on time. He wouldn't lie down and rest, though he sure needed it, and he wouldn't wait for me to get a doctor, though he needed that too. He accepted just the few cents that would get him to New York where he had friends to send him on to Philadelphia.

I gave him his direction and watched him make his way up the street, pretty wabbly on his pins but losing no time whatsoever. If he didn't get back to his ship in time I'll bet it was not his fault.

What I want to know is, did he? I didn't ask his name or give him mine and I've gone and forgotten his ship, but if it happens that this meets his eye—and, so far as I can figure, *Adventure* reaches the eye of most men in our Navy—I hope he'll drop me a line to tell me how he made out.

GLAD to have the following on ants. Come across with more, any of you who have had personal experience with ant armies. Amazingly interesting little rascals, and they belong in the field of adventure, all right, as many of you can testify who are familiar with the pleasant little ways in which they are used as torturers and executioners by savage tribes, both black and white—white, at least, as to general color.

Miami, Fla.

It seems to me that there has always been a lot of bother about ants. My earliest recollection about them is a lot of uncalled-for talk on the part of an aunt (this is not intended as a pun) of mine, who used to hold forth on the habits of the ant as the antipodes of some person, or thing, called the sluggard. It has taken years (I am English) for this to filter through my ivory; I need not tell my age, but I have quit paying poll tax and wearing rosettes on my shoes, but I begin to think she had some reference to me. I have come in contact with ants personally, lots of times, and have wished the sluggard was there in my place. In the early eighties I punched cows in northwestern Iowa. I have gone to sleep on the prairie and awakened covered with them (ants, not cows) and used language which you camouflage in *Adventure*. But I want to tell you what I have seen in armies of ants.

TWO years ago I was living in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. One day my wife called me to the front of the house and showed me an army of ants. I don't know how long they had been marching. This was in the morning about ten-thirty, but they had worn a path about an inch wide and a quarter of an inch deep. They did not march eight abreast, but were in companies or regiments which were not all the same length. At the spaces between regiments there were some who seemed to be officers, part of these ran back and forth on the edge of the path as though they were delivering orders. They came from the south, passed the east side of the house and went to the

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north, and it was twenty-four hours before the last of them went by.

I did not follow them up to see where they went, as I have never been fond of them since my aunt said what she did, but after reading what you said in Camp-Fire, I wish I had. Anyway, I have told you all I know or have seen in regard to ants.

I know they do travel in armies or regiments, with some who seem to be officers, and I guess there are lots of people who have never seen them.—J. A. GAMBLE.

AT ITS first dinner of the season the Adventurers' Club, New York chapter, displayed a "service-flag" with 43 stars. Title to still more has been found, with others to hear from. Pretty good for 180 members of all ages and physical conditions, with some still unreported.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Will sell: 1915, July—Dec. inclusive; 1916, all; 1917, all. 10 cents each, carriage paid—ED. S. RAHN, 1432 N. Allison St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Will sell: 1911, five issues; 1912, eight issues; 1913, Aug.—Dec. inclusive; 1914-15-16-17, all. H. C. DIXON, 1546 Woodward Ave., Cleveland, O.

Wanted: 1911, Nov.; 1912, Jan.; 1915, Dec.; 1916, Jan., Feb.—B. F. LEAVITT, 1040 Nicholas Bldg., Toledo, O.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Bldg., Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
S. B. H. HURST, Box 892, Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Hurst.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay: river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodscraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri Valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3
Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, care of Starbuck Ranch, Morrison, Colorado. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y.); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps, NOT attached*)

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Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Sayville, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, care R. J. Neuman, 160 Seaman Ave., Inwood, New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Adventurers' Club, 26 N. Dearborn St., Chicago. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ New Zealand, Cooks Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

25. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, care of H. E. ROBERTS, 55 John Street, New York, N. Y. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

Opportunities in Central America

Question:—"I am twenty-two years old, a stenographer with a high-school education and three years' clerical experience, one of which was spent in a railroad office; also I have a smattering of Spanish. Would you advise me to go to Central America for employment? Would I have any trouble getting a job and how much money could I expect? Could I either connect with some Central American concern here and get free transporation down there, or work my way down?"—L. A., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—Yes, I would advise you to go to Central America. A man can get more pay down there for less work than any place I know of. You might have to work rather hard at first but in the course of a few weeks or months you could get on to the ropes. You might have to go to work for as low as a hundred a month (U. S. money) at first but the usual minimum for American stenographers and clerks is from $125.00 up to about $175.00 and quarters are, as a rule, furnished free. Most of the official work, where you would be located, would be in English—the bulk of the work is done for the New York offices, or wherever the head office is located.

I believe you are a better stenographer than I am and I had no trouble landing jobs anywhere I struck. The trouble is that most of them do not like to give transportation from here down there. The local officials like to employ their own men. Fellows constantly happen along. If your nerve is good and you go down on your own hook I feel sure you could land a job about the first place you struck. I am going to give you a bunch of addresses. Write to them and if they turn you down for transportation write them again and ask them what would be the prospects if you came down on your own. And if they still speak discouragingly go to New Orleans and work your way down on either a passenger or freight boat.

Land in Puerto Barrios and strike the United Fruit people there. If there is nothing doing give one of the American passenger or freight conductors a hard-luck story and get them to give you a ride up to the city of Guatemala. Strike the general offices of the railroad there. They employ quite a number of American clerks, accountants, and stenographers there. The Americans who work for the railroad, especially the conductors, engineers and machinists are a good bunch. Many of them blew in there over the trail from Mexico. They used to hang out in Tom White's "Royal Café." Tom is a West Indian negro but he is as white a man as I ever met. He can tip off to you just where to go and will help you in many ways. I do not believe that bunch of Americans would let a man go hungry unless things have changed since I was there. I blew in there over the trail from Mexico and they treated me like a king.

Don't be afraid to hit any man for a feed down there if he looks like an American. Most of them have done it themselves and it is not such a disgrace down there as it is up here.

If there is nothing doing in Guatemala, either go down to Morales and hit the trail for Tegucigalpa, Honduras, or get some conductor to take you down to San José (Guatemala) and work your way to Puntarenas, Costa Rica, or to Corinto, Nicaragua. From Puntarenas you would have to go up to San José (Costa Rica). Corinto is the terminal of the Ferrocarril del Pacifico de Nicaragua. It is managed by an American corporation. Their general offices are located at Managua, the conductors are natives and will not carry you on your face and gift of gab but if you would wire Thos. O'Connell, Gen.

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Mgr. at Managua he might give you free transportation. If there happens to be an American station agent at Corinto, as there used to be, he could square you with a conductor.

Down around Limon, Costa Rica, the Atlantic port, there are many places with the United Fruit Company. Down below there at Bocas del Toro, or in fact at Cedar Creek, you will find the terminal of the Changuinola Railway which goes up into the plantations. They once had their headquarters at a place some fifteen or twenty miles upcountry at Changuinola Junction. Most of the employees of the Fruit Company in Costa Rica, laborers I mean, are West Indian negroes and speak English.

In the "Official Guide" to be had in any railroad ticket office may be found the addresses of the United Fruit Company Division Managers under the heading "United Fruit Company" and subheading "Division Managers." I would also suggest that you write to Mr. Minor C. Keith, Vice-President, United Fruit Co., 17 Battery Place, New York, N. Y. and tell him you are a first-class stenographer and office man.

I am going to include a few South American firms also:

Braden Copper Co., 120 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Cerro de Pasco Mining and Railway Co., 15 Broad St., New York, N. Y.

J. G. White & Co., Managers Ferrocarril del Pacifico de Nicaragua, 43 Exchange Place, New York, N. Y.

Wessel Duval & Co., 25 Broad St., New York, N. Y.

C. R. Union Mining Co., 20 Broad St., New York, N. Y.

South Brazil Lumber Co., 25 Broad St., New York, N. Y.

Guayaquil & Quito Railway Co., 25 Broad St., New York, N. Y.

Madera Mamore Railway Co., 25 Broad St., New York, N. Y.

I do not think you will receive a favorable reply from any of them. If they do I think your chances are better to go down as an office man. You can arrange to get into whatever line you desire after you get on to things down there. You might like being a foreman over a gang or acting as conductor of a banana train. They do not require experienced men on their banana trains. Time-keeping is good healthy work.

Come to think of it you might land a place on the Canal Zone. You could get broke in to the country in Panama and radiate from there. Write to "The Panama Canal," Washington, D. C. for a pamphlet dealing with conditions of employment on the Zone. Also write the Panama Railway Co., 21-24 State St., New York. They have some clerical jobs in the general offices in Colon that pay $100, $125 and up to $175, and no man ever killed himself working in those offices. They give free quarters also and Colon is a healthy town now. Also write Mr. C. H. Motsett, Supt. P. R. R., Colon, R. P. and make application.

The Lumberjack Regiment

Question:—"Do you know of any expedition I could join? Have been in lumber and mining camps for four years but would like to try something different."—PETER ENDEN, Ethridge, Mont.

Answer, by Mr. Gilman:—It is not lack of inclination but only lack of information which prevents my setting you on the trail of some sort of an expedition. Only one I know about is that to Berlin, via England, Belgium and France, which is being organized by the United States Government.

You may have missed the announcement that "lumberjack regiments" are being raised to supply skilled workmen to get out timber from the French forests for use on entrenchments etc. Such a regiment is being recruited in Minnesota, by the State Forester, W. T. Cox, State Capitol, St. Paul, Minn. State or Federal forestry officials in Montana may be able to give you information regarding such a contingent being raised in your neck of the woods.

Fishing, Farming, etc., in Maine

Question:—"I am going to Maine to locate on a farm, somewhere between Skowhegan and Rangeley Lakes, probably in the town of Strong, on the Sandy River R. R. Can you give me any information in regard to fishing, hunting, trapping in and around that section? Also about farming, trapping fur-bearing animals, etc."—JOHN KOLTZAU, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—There is much good fishing in the territory you ask about, also many good farms, but the hunting and trapping does not come up to that in the more northerly part of the State. The Rangeley region especially is noted for its good trout and salmon fishing. There is some fur to be had, trappers getting quite a few fox. The northern part of Somerset, and Aroostook County which is not so thickly settled, contains more and better fur, and the game is more numerous. As a farming country I can't give much reliable dope but I think the land is quite early and easy to work but of a porous sandy nature.

The hunting in the more northerly part of the State, in Somerset, Aroostook, Piscataquis, Penobscot, and parts of Washington County, are all that could be asked for. Plenty of deer, bear, wildcat, and of the small fur-bearing animals, mink, muskrat, weasel, otter, black cat, etc. There is also good bird-shooting, with plenty of partridge, duck, and woodcock. Moose is protected until 1919. You can secure a copy of the Fish and Game Laws, by writing to the Commissioners of Fish and Game, Augusta, Maine. This will give you full information on the subject.

As a farming section, Aroostook County has them all beat to a standstill for size of crops, the ground there being very productive.

Women in Alaska

Question:—"How are chances for a woman to make a business and pleasure trip combined alone through Alaska? What is the best town to start from? When does navigation from Seattle close? Am a good cook and waitress and would like to work my way as I go."—K. E. G., Miami, Arizona.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—You could leave in the Fall for some definite point in Alaska, with considerable assurance of obtaining employment of the sort you mention either there or nearby. But the traveling trip you would like to take had best be undertaken in the Spring. Going about seeing the

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country during the Winter is expensive and inconvenient, though if one is equipped properly, and can afford it, Winter inland travel in Alaska is very exhilarating and delightful. To make one's living at the same time is, however, scarcely practicable.

Women cooks in Alaska are always at a premium, and the men are respectful to businesslike women. Alaska is safe and "prosperous" for women. But distances are great between the few towns; the rest of the settlements are small, and rather primitive conditions prevail. One who is well, fairly young and temperamentally fitted to be satisfied with the conditions would be recompensed for a sojourn in Alaska. I should hardly advise you, however, to start with the idea of covering much of the country on your earnings as you went, unless you are prepared to stay quite a while—a year or two. On a short trip I think you might have difficulty in quickly obtaining satisfactory employment.

Going up and down the Yukon is one route adapted to your purpose. Another would be from Valdez to Fairbanks and then up to Dawson or down toward Nome. More restrictedly, either the south coast towns or the various camps of Seward Peninsula (Nome district) would offer itineraries.

Business on Martinique

Question:—"What are the business opportunities in the French island of Martinique? It is my intention to go down there within the next two months with a few thousand dollars, and I simply desire to know the kinds of business that are done now, and what chance a man has there with a limited amount of capital."—J. M., New York.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—Martinique: From reports I hear this island is due for a general livening up of business which will surpass anything ever known. Of course, sugar and rum are the chief staples, but cocoa and coffee offer alluring prospects. I know nothing of your business leanings; but aside from these productive industries there is a growing trade in light passenger automobiles of moderate cost; there is also a great demand for an American bank, for banking facilities for Americans are poor. There is also a great opening for the growing of stock for butcher's meat, since the native production constantly decreases and great quantities of salt meat and fish are imported, which should not be necessary. Fertilizers are at present imported to about a half-million dollars per annum. Openings here, too. All in all, I believe big money will be made right now in the sugar and rum business.

What Washington and Oregon Offer

Question:—"Is there much work to be had in Washington and Oregon? What is the big seaport in Washington? How is the climate in these two States?"—C. S. RANDALL, Girard, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—There is an urgent demand in the Coast States for farm labor and shipbuilders. The local men can take care of the rest of the jobs. Washington and Oregon are primarily agricultural and horticultural, but have many industries besides these. They ship immense quantities of salmon, for one thing. Their lumber shipments are the largest in America. I advise you to look up Seattle, Tacoma, Brenerton and Bellingham, Wash., in the atlas. The citizens of these towns would be startled if they knew their cities were so little known in Pennsylvania.

Seattle has shipping interests that are enormously large and is rated as one of our most important ports. The others are also large shippers. The mean average temperature at Seattle for the last twenty-four years runs, Summer, 64, Winter, 40. Washington and Oregon have snow in Winter, but not heavy nor on long, except in high mountains.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN IN FIVE ASKED FOR DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS

COLE, LUBIN MERTON, last heard from Seattle, Wash., 1901. Was starting for Alaska. Notify his sister.—MRS. FLORA E. A. GILBERT, East Taunton, Mass. (formerly Aurora, Ill.)

BYRON, W. A., brother, last seen at Gilroy, Cal., heading south.—Write J. B. BYRON, 315 East 4th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

TALMADGE, HENRY ARTHUR, last seen by me in Attleboro, Mass., in 1914. Home and relatives in Coshocton, Ohio. Believed to be somewhere in Ohio.—Write to your old pal, DICK DUNNE, 28 Court Street, New Britain, Conn.

DOVE, EMERY, last heard from in 1910. Was then in Akron, Ohio. May be still employed in match or rubber factory. His address wanted by "Cheyennl Chin."—Address ALEX MCRAE, Bordeau, Washington, Camp 7.

WINNIE, LEON LOUDON, my son. Went to Klondike in 1895. Married in Nome same year; then to gold strike somewhere in Canada. 43 years old, red hair, mustache, blue eyes, cast in right one. About 5 feet 8 in., stocky build. Mother getting on in years (76) mourns her boy very much.—Address MRS. LAURA WINNIE, 229 N. Felton Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

DRUMMOND, J. A., my husband, who disappeared from Portsmouth, Ohio, in July, 1917, is 54 years old, 5 feet 5 inches tall, has light hair (partly bald), blue eyes, and is a cripple in his hips. If any one knows anything of him, please write.—Address MRS. J. A. DRUMMOND, 53 Jackson Street, Paducah, Ky.

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SHELDON, WM. X., my father, last heard from at Buffalo, N. Y. in June, 1907, age 54, height 6 ft., weight 185 lbs., gray eyes, black hair (nearly gray), red beard or mustache, Scotch-Irish descent, any one knowing his whereabouts please notify me as I have some very important information for him.—Address KARL R. SHELDON, 11 Pine St., Oneonta, N. Y.

REICHE, CARL, my brother. Disappeared from home in 1908; was then working on the German sailing ship *Dora* soon after that. When last heard from was working in the offices of the Standard Oil Co. of Phila. Born at Bremerhaven, Germany, October 19, 1882. Any information concerning him will be gratefully received.—Address FREDERICK REICHE, 100 E. 87th St., New York City.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

SMITH, JOSEPH BURTON, brother. Known as "Bert." Height 5 ft. 11 in., weight 165 lbs., light complexion, brown eyes, dark-brown hair, 34 years old. Last heard of in Fort Mott, N. J., before being discharged from U. S. Army in 1907.—Address H. E. SMITH, Savier St. Car Barns, Portland, Oregon.

ROAN, TEXAS (TOM). Trick and fancy rider in W. W.'s Wild-West Show in 1911-12. You can get your old job back if you need some "jack." Last heard from at Ft. Shafter, H. T. 5 ft. 9 in. tall, dark-brown hair about 160 lbs., 25 or 26 years old.—Write your old pal "CHIP," care of *Adventure*.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the mid-December or first January issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ACKEN, B. C. (Barney); Anderson, Charles Michell Anderson; Armstrong, Thomas; Burns, Wm.; Campbell, Kennard; Challs, Theodore Menage; Douglas, James R.; Edwards, John H.; Fisher "Bud" sometimes known as Freddie Finger; Gardner, Henry; Greathouse, John T.; Gruman, Herschell J.; Hoffman, Frank L.; Hottenstein, George Edward; Kilder, Irwin; King, Jim; Lindholm, Victor A.; McEnaney, Philip J.; MacConnell, Talbert; Mohoney, Ed.; Moore, Robert H.; Morrison, Karl C.; Newman, Roy A.; Noack, Herbert; Reed, H. Bill; Ryan, Andrew; Shepherd, "Jack" or N. G.; Stevens, Wrene Geurea; Talbot, Allan Wheeler; Willard, Thomas Manley; Williams, Geo. W.; Wood Basil; Yeusan, Alfred.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

MISCELLANEOUS—Gutteridge "Bo," Dennie Leary, Pete; "Batt" Strand and "Scratch;" Howard Moody; Fred Johnson; Harpoole and Mechanic, Fred Yeager; Freeman, H. Wynne, Hallett, Mr. Bennett; Students of Cherterfield School, North Vancowen, B. C.; H. W. H.

HASTLAR GAL BREATH.

NUMBERS L. T., 84, C 293, W 311, W 312, L, T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address HARRY ERWIN WADE, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Here is the list of strong stories, in addition to those mentioned on page 2, scheduled for the First February *Adventure*, out Jan. 3d, and what they are about.

With Sharp Sword Edges, Part II

By Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur

Fierce and terrible were the bloody man-to-man battles of the Norsemen. Yet how heroic they were you will find by following dauntless *King Harald* and his conquering army. In the second instalment of this thrilling five-part story he journeys through hostile lands northward.

Physically Disqualified *By Frederick Simpich*

The tale of a cripple, whose heart was set in unswerving purpose to serve his country in war time. And of how his chance came.

Breed of the Brush *By William Harper Dean*

Old Pete Lanahan commits the unpardonable Texan sin: he makes a weather prophecy. Some of the results have little to do with weather.

G 2—Defective *By Thomas Addison*

The drab life of a fifty-two-year-old bookkeeper. But when his country is at war, the high light of patriotism sparkles—and he of dull, unromantic existence does more than his share.

Danny Takes a Chance *By Roy P. Churchill*

The crippled homeward voyage of the U. S. S. *Dayton*. And the unlooked-for circumstances that influence *Quartermaster Danny Wallace* to take a very long chance.

The Sleuth *By Edgar Wallace*

A tale of *Commissioner Sanders'* magic and of how a N'gombi cannibal chief tried to overcome it.

Soap *By George L. Catton*

The Minnesota woods. *Ben Hale* is strong and robust in body. But his mind is dirty. "Get the money," is his creed. See if anything can change his nature.

Shorty's Letter from Home *By Sidney Rittenberg*

About a Hindu woman's disquieting prophecy and a gullible sailorman's fear of it.

McLean Mends His Medicine *By Hugh Pendexter*

An Indian tale of the fifties. What came of *Trapper McLean's* months of brooding over the loss of a mysterious little article carried away in an Indian raid.

FIRST FEBRUARY ADVENTURE

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Old age, statistics show, finds not one person in 1,000 worth $1,000 at the time of his death; not five persons in 5,000 worth $5,000 at death; not ten persons in 10,000 worth $10,000, etc. Statistics, furthermore, show that 70 per cent of all persons who live to the age of sixty have no tangible support of their own.

Employing the plan we propose, one of our representatives, Dr. Carl Scharf, Atlanta, Ga.—although blind—makes $10,000 a year; another of our agents, Alexander Heath, Malden, Mass., receives a yearly income of more than $5,000—and these are but a few examples from the hundreds now making an excellent livelihood by this special plan.

Write us today—now—before some one else secures your territory ahead of you.

Address—at once—Subscription Correspondence, Dept. 3 **ADVENTURE** Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y.

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The Story of Belgium—By Brand Whitlock

No bigger story than this can come out of the war. As United States Minister to Belgium since December, 1913, Mr. Whitlock has seen and felt the tragedy of a nation. The deportations, the atrocities, the murder of Edith Cavell, the sufferings of thousands—he knows these at first hand. In ten or a dozen instalments, running through 1918, he will tell the whole story. A foreword appears in January.

Johnnie Goes Marching In

A moving picture of our New National Army arriving at camp. One of a fine series describing the cantonments—from the first plan of the buildings to the last effect on our soldiers.

The White Arc

There is still time to get under way on this big, splendid serial by Henry Kitchell Webster—one of the best stories of 1918. Centering about a young man in big business and the daughter of an army officer, it is a story with many strands—all modern, all American, all absorbing.

Training Our Army Eagles

Henry Woodhouse, who is an acknowledged authority in aviation, tells just how our men are trained to play their vital part in winning the war. The kind of article that answers your questions.

Everybody's for January

On the News-stands December 22

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